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SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD. YOU'VE PASSED YOUR DRIVING

test. The sensation of freedom is overwhelming. You can go anywhere! Except you can't, because you need to get your mum's permission to drive her Fiat Uno 1000 Fire. And she's not comfortable with you driving on your own yet. Perhaps you shouldn't have been so cocky when she was teaching you; practising (well, butchering) heel-and-toe shifts when you should've been paying more attention to sensible things like reverse parking. Booring...

The night you pass your test you beg, and I mean beg, to borrow the Fiat. Mum finally relents. Twenty minutes later with your buddies Jeremy in the front and John in the back, you understeer into a hedge. John and Jeremy are disappointed – after all, you're the car guy. You're the one who can reel off every F1 champion by year. You're the one who always wins on *Outrun*.

Ten minutes after you extract the Uno from the hedge, you're attempting to reverse park in the local pub car park. There's a clang noise as the Uno's three-quarter panel slams into a Mk4 Cortina's bumper. The Ford is unscathed. Your mum's Fiat has a large punch mark in it (and some hedge in the grille). First day; two prangs. Mum is going to go mad.

There's only one thing for it – buy your own car, choose your own destiny, take any damage on the chin, be accountable to yourself. Your buddy Dominic is selling his yellow Mini 1275GT. It's been in a prang and the rear subframe isn't exactly square but you'd secretly longed for that car since the day he turned up to the sixth-form in it. He wants £80. That's what he's been offered scrap. A couple of weeks later you hand over the cash.

The insurance people say it's going to cost £475 to insure. What?! Your dad says you probably should've got a quote before you bought it. You scrounge together the money, and soon you're crabbing down the road in your own wheels – and it feels like heaven. You're driving all hours. Enjoying that exquisite nirvana of driving just for the hell of it. One night Southend. Another Margate. One day you even brave central London.

In reality, the Mini soon crumbles away. Rust has set in, and its pandemic. Back to the Uno. And you'll have to share it with your sister. But *muuumm!*

I loved that 1275GT not for what it was but for what it represented. It wasn't an 'evo car' by today's standards but it felt like it to me. The colour, the stripes, the snorty carb – it was different. Then one day I got all the affirmation I needed. A bloke in a Miami Blue 205 GTI – a car I longed for – nodded at me. My friends thought it was weird, but it felt to me like I'd been welcomed into a brotherhood.

I hope you enjoy issue 204 of *evo* – new staff writer Sam Sheehan's piece on readers' first *evo* cars in particular is a cracker. I'd love to hear your early car-owning memories. Email me at nickt@evo.co.uk

Nick Trott Editor (@evoNickTrott)



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Does Porsche have a fight on its hands with the launch of the long-awaited Mercedes-AMG GT? Jethro Bovingdon and Dan Prosser find out as they pit the new Merc coupe against the latest 911 GTS in a head-to-head battle in California

070 SLS BLACK SERIES v 997 GT2 RS

The AMG GT and 991 GTS certainly aren't the first Mercedes and Porsche sports cars to brawl. Jethro scares himself in the SLS AMG Black and Porsche's ballistic 997 GT2 RS, with a little help from Le Mans legend Andy Wallace



082 TT GROUP TEST

The new Audi TT certainly has style, but does it have the substance to beat the scalpel-sharp Peugeot RCZ R, the neatly balanced Subaru BRZ and the brawny Nissan 370Z? David Vivian finds out



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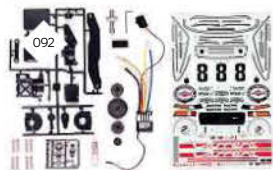
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...AND GETS A MANUAL

F-TYPE GOES AWD...

Up close

F-type's new transmissions

Sports-oriented four-wheel
drive and a six-speed manual
are added to the F-type line-up,
although not both together

Words: Antony Ingram

p18 SPEED DEMONS

Auto Vivendi supercar club reveals plans for more specialised top speed events and new venues



p21 AUDI'S NEW DESIGN DIRECTION

Prologue concept reveals what Audi's designers are thinking of for the future



p21 LEADING THE CHARGE

How battery technology for electric cars and hybrids has moved on, especially with recharging



SPROUTING FROM the centre console of Jaguar's revised F-type Coupe and Convertible

is a device the likes of which Jaguar sports car drivers haven't seen for a long time – a manual gearlever.

While paddleshifts dominate the premium market these days, Jaguar's engineers and PR people believe that there's a real market for a manual. In the UK, it could account for up to a fifth of F-type sales.

The rod-operated shift has been engineered for a mechanical feel and has a short, 45mm throw. The gearbox has dry-sump lubrication to reduce frictional losses, and the manual set-up is lighter than the automatic, by 10kg, providing further benefits for the enthusiastic driver.

The catch is that it's only available on the V6 and V6 S models – F-type chief programme engineer Russ Varney says the manual arrangement simply isn't strong enough for the supercharged V8's hefty torque output. That said, Jaguar hasn't completely ruled out a manual V8. Choosing the manual gearbox, where available, will save you £1800.

The manual 'box is one of several new technological steps for the 2015 F-type. Equally significant is the introduction of an all-wheel drive option. Available on the V6 S – but not



Above: two surprises – one is a manual gearlever, the other a decent infotainment system. **Left:** the new all-wheel-drive (but rear-biased) transmission laid bare



with the manual gearbox – and V8 models, the all-wheel-drive system is said to be optimised for performance and dynamics.

In normal driving the AWD F-types should behave much as their rear-drive counterparts, with 100 per cent of the power directed towards the rear wheels. Varney says that torque can be sent forwards as necessary,

'0-60 in 3.9sec makes the AWD R the quickest F-type yet'

though the system stops short of powering the front wheels alone – an understandable decision when the V8 R develops up to 501lb ft of torque.

Externally, only a slightly revised bonnet design – with new vents and creases along its length – gives away the AWD car, along with a small badge at the rear. Choosing AWD adds £4850 to the price, 80kg in weight (according

to Jaguar's figures) and in the case of the R trims the claimed 0-60mph time by a tenth of a second to 3.9sec – the quickest yet for an F-type.

And talking of the R, that badge has finally made its way onto a soft-top F-type. The R Convertible replaces the 488bhp V8 S Convertible, and matches the R Coupe's 542bhp, 0-60 times and limited top speed of 186mph. In AWD form the R Convertible will also be the most expensive F-type yet, with a price tag of £97,135.

The changes for 2015 don't stop there. The updated F-type has gained electric power steering, ousting the existing hydraulic set-up. Jaguar has spent the last five years developing its EPAS system, but decided against fitting it to the F-type at launch. Now it believes the system can deliver feel, accuracy and weighting that eclipses the old hydraulic arrangement.

Meanwhile, Torque Vectoring by Braking, previously on the R only, is now standard on the V6 S too and an option on the entry-level V6.

Finally, Jaguar has introduced a new 'InControl Touch' infotainment system, offering an interface more worthy of a premium market car. InControl links your smartphone to the in-dash display, allowing interaction with, for example, music and social media apps. Voice control ensures distraction should be minimised. ❏

How the F-type AWD compares

Engine	V8, 5000cc, supercharger
Power	542bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque	502lb ft @ 3500rpm
Weight	1730kg
Power-to-weight	318bhp/ton
0-62mph	4.1sec (claimed)
Top speed	186mph (limited)
Basic price	£91,650



JAGUAR F-TYPE R COUPE AWD

Engine	V8, 5000cc, supercharger
Power	542bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque	502lb ft @ 3500rpm
Weight	1730kg
Power-to-weight	318bhp/ton
0-62mph	4.1sec (claimed)
Top speed	186mph (limited)
Basic price	£91,650



AUDI R8 V8 S-TRONIC

Engine	V8, 4163cc
Power	424bhp @ 7900rpm
Torque	317lb ft @ 4500rpm
Weight	1565kg
Power-to-weight	275bhp/ton
0-62mph	4.3sec (claimed)
Top speed	186mph (claimed)
Basic price	£96,635



PORSCHE 911 C4 GTS PDK

Engine	Flat-six, 3800cc
Power	424bhp @ 7500rpm
Torque	324lb ft @ 5750rpm
Weight	1490kg
Power-to-weight	289bhp/ton
0-62mph	4.0sec (claimed)
Top speed	188mph (claimed)
Basic price	£98,679



Radar

THE WORLD'S

Released from the strictures of FIA WRC regulations, rally specialist Prodrive has created possibly the ultimate Golf to compete in the Chinese Rally Championship **Words:** Sam Sheehan

FASTEST GOLF?

First look

Super-Golf reveals its fresh new muscle

I 'I CAN ONLY imagine what it must have been like, arriving at Banbury to see half the place flattened. Only a few weeks earlier they'd handed over £350,000. It must have been quite unnerving.'

Paul Eastman, Prodrive's head of rally design, can laugh now. His team's latest creation, the open rally spec VW Golf SCRC, built for China-based FAW-Volkswagen, sits in front of us, fully built except for a set of wheels and holes for the bonnet pins.

We're standing in one of the few remaining Prodrive buildings, the rest having been demolished ahead of a big move across the road. 'Given half of Prodrive was gone, FAW-VW placed a lot of trust in us.'

Trust, not just that Prodrive wasn't about to disappear from existence with £350k in its pocket, but also that it could build a competitive rally car, from scratch, in just six months.

'When they said they needed the car by November, and bearing in mind this was June, I wasn't too confident. And when they said they didn't have

any of the digital scans for the five-door car, we realised time was going to be even tighter.'

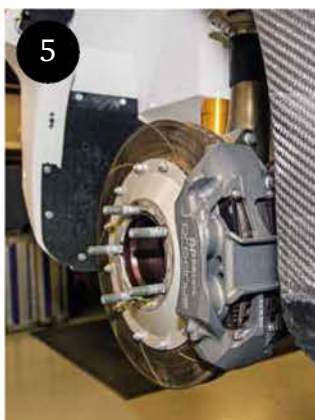
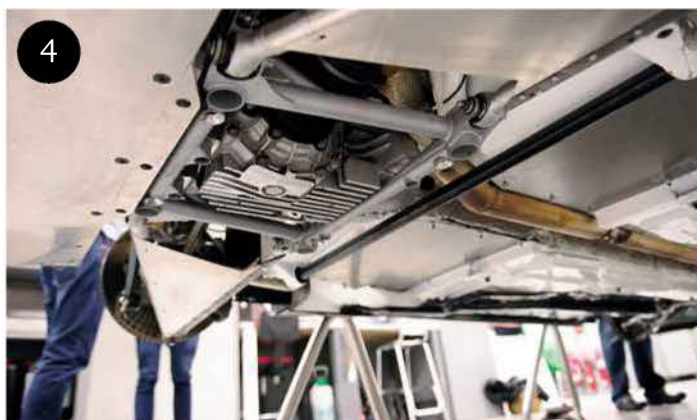
Standing next to the near-finished car, it's hard to believe that it was a French dealer demonstrator just a few months back. Rather than arriving from VW as a bodyshell, it was driven back to the UK from the Continent, stripped and dipped back to its bare bodyshell and scanned, whilst a sister demo car remained intact and was also scanned to enable Prodrive to have 'clothed' and 'unclothed' scans to base its build on.

From there the six-strong team was able to turn the Golf into a rallying VW that should be faster than even Sébastien Ogier's WRC Polo. But then as the China Rally Championship has open regulations, a larger, 2-litre turbo engine with a bigger, 35mm air restrictor can be used, along with a more aggressive aero package.

You know the Golf SCRC must be really special when Prodrive calls it 'the best rally car we've ever made'. Given the short timescale for the build, that's quite something. **x**

'OPEN REGS MEAN A LARGER, 2-LITRE TURBO ENGINE, PLUS A MORE AGGRESSIVE AERO PACKAGE'

1: Huge rear wing permissible under China's open rally regs; five-door Golf chosen as it's the smallest car FAW-VW sells in China. **2:** Big lever links to WRC-spec Xtrac six-speed sequential gearbox. **3:** Turbo 2-litre four kicks out more than 300bhp, running with 2bar boost and a 35mm restrictor. **4:** Car is made up of bespoke and shared parts, developed in-house to fit multiple platforms. **5:** AP Racing four-pot calipers clamp 355mm discs; dampers are three-way adjustable. **6:** Eastman explains that Prodrive wants to take on more such projects



Prologue shows shape of new A9

Audi's future design and tech revealed

Words: Sam Sheehan



Four-spoke steering wheel is inspired by that found in the original Quattro

'Virtual cockpit' gives the impression of three separate layers at different depths within the instrument binnacle.

Each layer displays different info, depending on its importance, and what is shown can change depending on the selected mode

Lower central touchscreen controls various vehicle settings and can also receive handwriting input. When not in use, the OLED (organic light emitting diode) screen turns almost completely transparent and folds away

The shift-by-wire gearlever acts as a wrist rest when the central screen is in use. It has been designed to sit as flush as possible with the central tunnel

Main dash panel contains three displays. The passenger gets a widescreen touchscreen, from which navigation information can be sent to the driver's virtual cockpit with a swiping action

Audi's 'Butler' software identifies each passenger by their smartphone and adjusts seats and climate control to their individual preferences. Phones can be wirelessly charged

A AUDI GAVE US a glimpse of the future at the recent LA auto show when it revealed its new Prologue concept. Touted as the forerunner to a forthcoming A9, the sports coupe concept's design is said



to hold inspiration for future models.

The striking exterior flaunts sharp lines with bulging arches that hark back to the original Quattro's, with a swooping bonnet and roofline. Taut proportions and 22in wheels disguise the car's large, A8-matching footprint.

Under the bonnet sits a twin-turbo 4-litre TFSI V8 producing 597bhp and 516lb ft of torque, with an additional 37lb ft available during short bursts of 'overboost'.

Despite a hefty 1980kg kerb weight, that

grunt enables the concept to reach 62mph in a claimed 3.7sec, no doubt helped by quattro traction and a quick-changing eight-speed Tiptronic 'box.

Underneath, the chassis gets five-link air suspension and all-wheel steering that can turn the rear wheels by as much as five degrees.

Inside, a high-tech dash (detailed above) is joined by wood veneers, aluminium trim and soft leathers.

The car also features a 48-volt electrical system that's powered by an independent electric motor, making the concept a 'mild hybrid'. Audi says the system is destined to make it into production very soon. ✕

News in brief



Endurance calendar

If you enjoy Drew Gibson's photography in this issue's Race of Remembrance feature then his 2015 Endurance calendar is a must-have. Featuring breathtaking shots from the 2014 sportscar season – including Le Mans – the 420 x 300mm calendar costs £29.99 and is available from drew-gibson.co.uk



Spot Trace tracker

Globalstar has created a tracker that keeps tabs on your car any time and anywhere. Spot Trace is small (5 x 7 x 2cm), can be mounted almost anywhere, and contacts you via text or email when its vibration sensor detects movement. You can then follow its GPS coordinates on Google Maps. We have a Spot Trace unit worth £99 to give away – head to facebook.com/evomagazine to find out more.



Kristensen retires

Nine-time Le Mans-winner Tom Kristensen has announced his retirement. Seven of those wins were in Audis; he also clinched the inaugural World Endurance Championship with the German marque in 2013. During a career spanning four decades, Kristensen has DTM, BTCC, ALMS and F3000 race wins to his name. The 47-year-old Dane's last race was the Six Hours of São Paulo in November.



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Fuel consumption figures in mpg (l/100km) for the new Kia Carens range are: Urban 33.6 (8.4) – 48.7 (5.8), Extra Urban 53.3 (5.3) – 68.9 (4.1), Combined 44.1 (6.4) – 60.1 (4.7). CO₂ emissions are 159 – 124 g/km. MPG figures are official EU test figures for comparative purposes and may not reflect real driving results. Model shown: Kia Carens '1' 1.6 GDi 133 bhp 6-speed manual ISG 7-seat @ £17,605 including £900 customer saving and metallic paint. Customer savings vary by model derivative. Specification is subject to change without notice. Price, Reevoo score and number of reviews correct at time of going to press. 7 year / 100,000 mile manufacturer's warranty, for terms and exclusions visit www.kia.co.uk. Offer not available with any other offer. Retail sales only. Subject to availability on vehicles registered between 01/10/14 and 31/12/14. Finance subject to status. Terms and conditions apply. 18's or over. Guarantee/indemnity may be required. **You will not own the vehicle until all payments are made.** Kia Motors Finance RH1 1SR. The Bluetooth® word mark and logo are registered trademarks and owned by the Bluetooth SIG, Inc.

Vivendi to keep going flat out

Director Craig Williams reveals future plans for VMax200 events

Words: Antony Ingram



Above: Craig Williams says that speed events remain key to Auto Vivendi's activities

T'THERE'S A LOT of talk on barstools in pubs about whether a Ferrari 458 or McLaren 12C is quicker.

We actually do it for real.'

Craig Williams, Director at private supercar club Auto Vivendi and originator of the VMax200 concept, has been doing it for real since 2002. And he'll continue doing it for real into 2015 and beyond. In 2014, the company paired up with **evo** to create **evoMax** (see issue 202). Cars present included a Veyron, a LaFerrari and a thousand-horsepower Nissan Qashqai. A target for next year, says Williams, is to get the 'big three' together at a VMax200 event – the Porsche 918, McLaren P1 and LaFerrari.

That will be quite a coup for a company that started out of a simple desire to drive supercars in a manner the makers intended. With such cars becoming too fast to fully exploit on public roads, Williams got together with a group of like-minded individuals, approached the Bruntingthorpe Proving Ground, hired its two-mile runway for a day, and had some fun.

'The event grew from there,' he explains, 'but it was always a sort of underground, secret, invite-only event.' In the age of the internet, such

secret events don't remain so for long, and while VMax200 has remained invite-only, its scale has grown as other supercar owners long to extend their own vehicles in a safe, friendly environment.

A non-judgemental one too. 'I'm always very keen to push the fact that our members are a sensible group of high-end supercar owners. We do a full safety briefing before every event, always use the *Top Gear* safety team and everyone's very respectful of each others' cars,' Williams tells us.

That respect is all the more important when two cars are sharing the same sector of runway. VMax200 has grown in parallel with owners occasionally unwilling to take their cars on regular trackdays – perhaps in fear of coming to grief at the end of someone's aggressively driven track special. 'At VMax200 everything is spaced out. People feel they can relax, yet still push their cars.'

While straight-line blasts are central to VMax's appeal – particularly as speeds have risen from a 174mph Diablo at the first event to 212mph at the recent **evoMax** – there's much more to the events. Since joining Auto Vivendi, Williams has had the time and budget to turn it into the definitive

supercar experience, without detracting from its purity.

Owners can explore their cars' potential in more or less any way they like once safety crews have given the green light. Simple top speed blast? Sure, but why not line up alongside a friend and see who gets there first? At **evoMax**, Williams introduced a quarter-mile board, giving attendees an idea of their speed at that distance: 'You might see a 911 GT3 getting to 100, maybe 105mph by that point – but the Veyron and LaFerrari were doing nearly 130mph. It's a great way of seeing what a car will do.'

More diverse experiences are on the way. There's an event coming up at Dunsfold Aerodrome – home of a certain car-themed TV show – and a few runs out to Wales, one of which will take in the **evo** Triangle. Back at Bruntingthorpe, VMax200 will set up a VIP drivers' lounge to hang out in between runs. Themed events are on the way, too: DeutscheMax, for German cars, VMax Britannia and VMax Italia. And VMax won't stop there, either, as Williams explains: 'We're going to offer some little extras that will make it a better day out. Some of those will be technological, and some will just be social.' ☒

News in brief



New Lister hypercar

Buoyed by the success of selling re-imagined versions of its historic 'Knobbly' race car, Lister MD Laurence Whittaker has announced plans to build a 'world-beating' hypercar with a £2million price tag. The car exists only in sketch form at the moment, but Lister is now seeking external investors to fund the project.



Subaru BRZ Cosworth

Renowned tuner Cosworth promises to inject some sparkle into the Subaru BRZ's performance with a new Stage 2 tune for the FA-20 2-litre boxer engine. A new manifold, intercooler and supercharger boost output to 280bhp and 226lb ft of torque. Pricing has yet to be announced, but Stage 1 tuning starts at £1995.



Audi R8 Competition

Audi revealed its fastest-ever production vehicle at the recent Los Angeles motor show, in the form of the LMS-inspired R8 Competition. Based on the R8 V10 Plus, its 5.2-litre engine produces 570bhp, enabling 0-60mph in 3.2sec and a top speed of 199mph. A sports exhaust system and ceramic brakes are standard, and just 60 examples will be made – all of them destined for the US market.

SWISS HERITAGE | MODERN DESIGN



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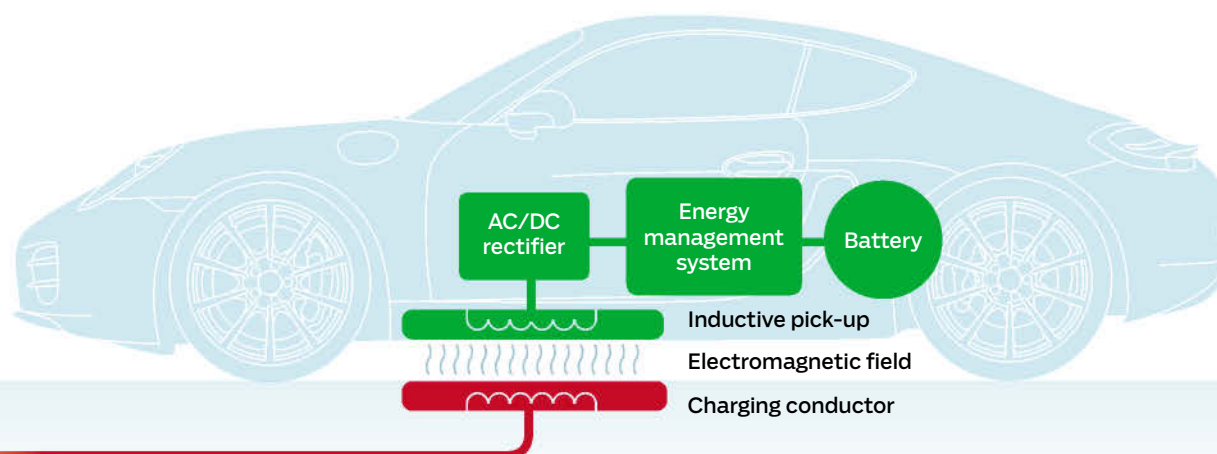
PEUGEOT RECOMMENDS TOTAL Official Fuel Consumption in MPG (l/100km) and CO₂ emissions (g/km) for the 208 GTi 30th Limited Edition are: Urban 40.9 (6.9), Extra Urban 61.4 (4.6), Combined 52.3 (5.4) and CO₂ 125 (g/km). MPG figures are achieved under official EU test conditions, intended as a guide for comparative purposes only and may not reflect actual on-the-road driving conditions. Information correct at time of going to press.

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MOTION & EMOTION



PEUGEOT



Electricity grid

THE RECHARGING REVOLUTION

BATTERY TECHNOLOGY FOR electric vehicles has come a long way since the humble milk float. Today we are getting more power, for longer, and with faster charge times. That last point is not to be underestimated if electric cars are to enjoy widespread success, as charging time is one of the main anxieties people have with Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs). However, recently we've seen a number of developments that will make recharging a BEV quicker and more convenient. Let's take a closer look.

WIRED CHARGING

There are three main ways of charging an electric car: trickle charging, fast charging and rapid charging.

Trickle charging is the conventional method that uses a 3kW power output (think electric kettle power). Depending on the capacity of the battery store, it will take around eight hours to achieve a full charge using this method.

Fast charging uses a single-phase power output of around 7-22kW. These are becoming more popular in the UK and can half the charge time to around four hours for an average BEV battery.

Rapid charging uses a 43kW+ power output to charge an average BEV battery pack to 80 per cent of its full

The inconvenience of charging an electric vehicle is set to become a thing of the past, with top-up times cut to minutes – and the need to plug the car in removed altogether

Words: Michael Whiteley, research scientist

capacity in 30 minutes. Rapid charging is relatively new, and a project headed by the 'Trans-European Network – Transport' programme (TEN-T) is hoping to install 74 rapid-charge points across the UK. The TEN-T project is supported by some of the top electric-car makers, including BMW, Nissan and Renault, and is aimed at making BEVs more attractive to the public by reducing charge times.

Rapid charging has been proved to damage the batteries to a certain degree over time, but it's not as bad as previously thought. It has been shown with a Nissan Leaf that racked up more than 40,000 miles that the overall change in energy capacity was down 4 per cent compared with normal charging; so, not too worrying.

Where do we go from rapid charging? Tesla may hold the answer, and it's called 'supercharging'. The American car maker is embarking on installing a range of supercharging stations throughout Europe, and we currently have five in the UK. These units are rated at 120kW,

or 400 volts at over 250 amps, and can charge a Tesla Model S to a 170-mile range in only 30 minutes.

WIRELESS CHARGING

We can trace wireless charging back to the electric toothbrush, and more recently we have seen retrofit kits to make our phones charge without wires. Scaled up, the same technology can charge BEVs, and it is even being used by the Formula E single-seater championship – although not for the competing cars; instead, wireless charging is being used for the BMW i3 and i8 support cars. The technology is supplied by telecommunications and semi-conductor specialist Qualcomm and uses inductive charging to keep the support cars topped up and ready to go.

The exact technology used is called resonant magnetic induction. It employs a primary and secondary coil to charge the battery (see diagram, above). One coil is housed in a ground pad, the second in an underbody pad fitted to the car. An oscillating current is

passed through the ground coil, creating an oscillating magnetic field. The coil on the car can pick up on this resonance, transferring current to the on-board battery store.

As an added bonus, compared with cabled charging the risk is reduced in an inductive system as there are no opportunities for the user to touch anything dangerous.

OTHER CHARGING OPTIONS

We recently came across Magtec, a Sheffield-based company that is the drivetrain partner for the Lightning Car Company's electric sports car. While most BEVs use lithium-ion (Li-ion) batteries, which are based on the same battery technology that powers your phone, tablet or laptop, Magtec is using a different type of battery to reduce charging times.

Called lithium-titanate batteries, they are an upgraded version of lithium-ion batteries. Using this technology, Magtec reckons it can fully charge the Lightning GT in around 20 minutes. Outright power from this type of battery is down on that from traditional Li-ion units. However, the Lightning GT still produces 400kW (536bhp), which should shove it silently from standstill to 60mph in less than 4.5sec and allow it to top out at 175mph. ☒



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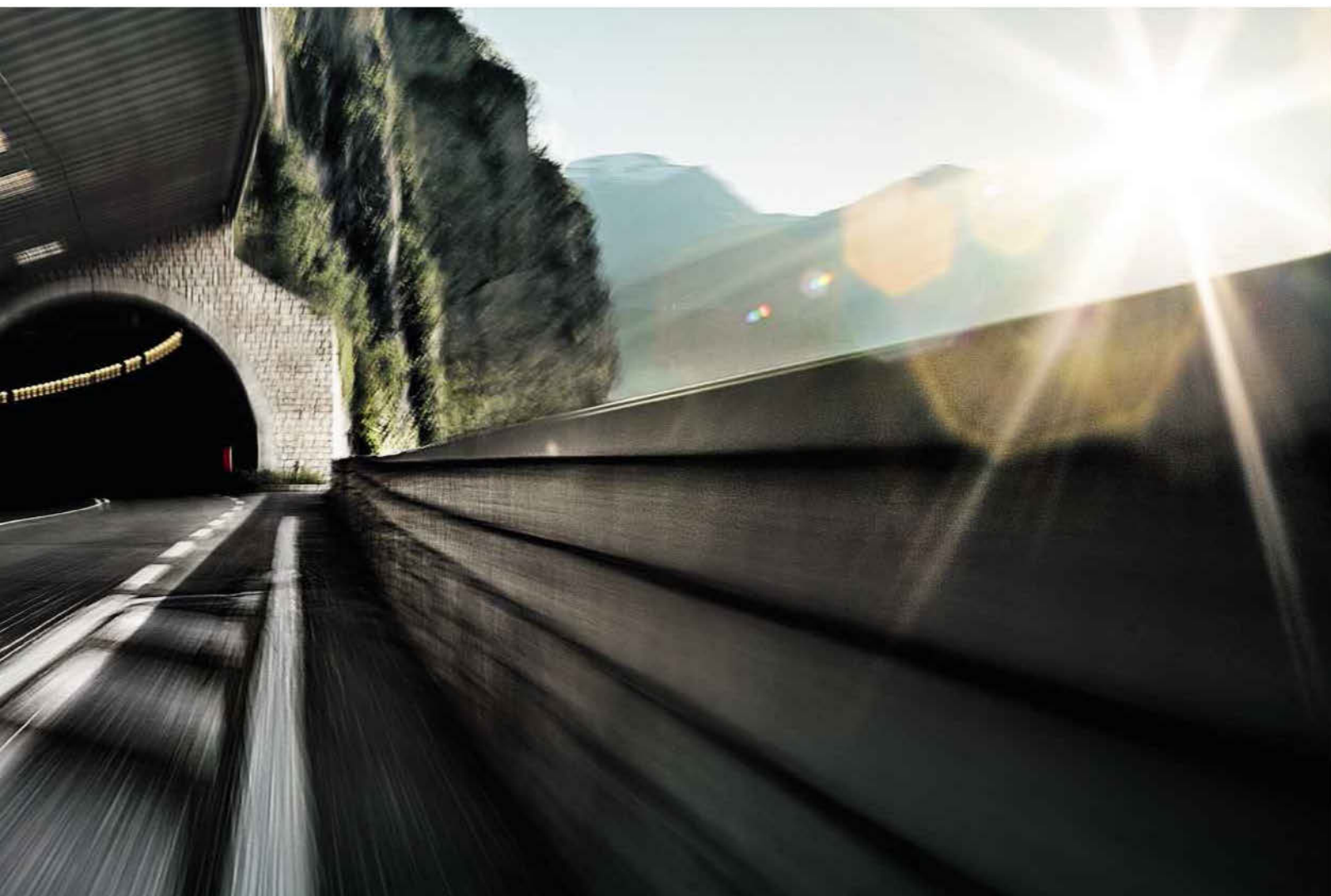
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PORSCHE

Every new evo car that matters, rated



Ferrari 458 Speciale A

Test location: Futa Pass, Italy GPS: 44.082932, 11.283377

A fitting tribute to the imminent passing of the last of Ferrari's naturally aspirated V8 engines

Photography: Aston Parrott

EVERYTHING LOOKS pretty much the same at the evocative old entrance to the Ferrari factory on Via Abetone Inferiore. There are people scurrying in and out, uniformed staff at reception issuing guest passes and, as ever, an exhilarating air of organised chaos. However, appearances are deceptive and beneath the sense of the familiar, the very ground we walk on might as well be rumbling

and grinding as it breaks apart and reforms into something new. Around here the times really are a-changin'.

To recap: Luca di Montezemolo is out, Alonso will follow, technical director Roberto Fedeli has defected to BMW and soon Ferrari itself will be wrenched from the Fiat Chrysler Group and ten percent of the company will be floated on the stock exchange. What does all this mean? Only new boss Sergio Marchionne knows, and while he's

making encouraging noises about not flooding every city with bright red SUVs with a Prancing Horse on their bull noses, there's one thing Ferrari has long held sacred that's definitely dying... We're here to drive the final iteration of the normally aspirated V8-powered Ferrari. The turbo motors are coming.

We'll see the new 458T at the Geneva show in March and there's little doubt it'll offer more power, a mountain of torque and a more



This month

FERRARI 458 SPECIALE A

The eCoty-winning V8
Ferrari loses its roof

p24



NISSAN 370Z NISMO

Hardcore Z gets revised
chassis and looks

p30



JAGUAR F-TYPE COUPE

Entry-level V6 F-type
tested. Is it all you need?

p35



MINI COOPER SD FIVE-DOOR

Mini hatch gets added
practicality from extra doors

p36



REVO GOLF R

371bhp tuned Golf hits
60mph in just 3.7sec

p39



The team

With the Speciale A leading our Driven section, we asked the **evo** road-test team where their perfect location for driving a convertible supercar would be:



NICK TROTT

Editor

'Late Spring, just after sunset, up in the hills in Garrotxa in northern Spain. Can I pick a Zonda Roadster, please?'



HENRY CATCHPOLE

Features editor

'Gran Sasso in Italy. It feels like you're on the roof of the world.'



DAN PROSSER

Road tester

'A convertible supercar? Probably Whiteladies Road in Bristol at about 12mph.'



JETHRO BOVINGTON

Contributing editor

'N-260 through the Pyrenees. Beautiful road, stunning scenery, destination Barcelona. Perfect.'



RICHARD MEADEN

Contributing editor

'Mont Ventoux in an Aventador Roadster. Flat-out pre-dawn ascent to catch sunrise from the summit.'



DAVID VIVIAN

Contributing road tester

'The Mojave Desert, California, at sunrise. The biggest red sky I've ever seen and no traffic.'

saintly CO2 output. What remains to be seen is whether it can match the sharpness, intensity and sheer joy afforded by the current 4.5-litre V8. It's a question for another day, but an engineer quietly admitted to us with a heavy heart that 'without legislation we would never develop a turbocharged engine'. He didn't seem so much sad as angry, right down to his core. I'm reminded of this when the key to the 458 Speciale A is handed to me. 'This is a

celebration of the naturally aspirated V8, no? Let's enjoy it while we can.'

The weather is horrific but I'm not about to argue. It's no secret that we're fully paid-up members of the Speciale fan club and the 'A' version (as in 'aperta', or 'open'), of which only 499 will be produced at £228,682, looks unlikely to change that. It retains the wildly powerful, fearsomely sharp V8 that spits out 597bhp at 9000rpm and 398lb ft at 6000rpm and everything else

Above: loss of the 458's roof has a small effect on rigidity, but not enough to prevent you doing this sort of stuff; Ferrari's electronic nanny lets you have plenty of fun whilst guarding against your worst excesses



that makes the coupe such an immersive car: the seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox, the E-diff, the magnetorheological dampers, the latest CCM3 carbon-ceramic brakes and that incredible Side Slip angle Control (SSC) system that lets you run right up to the car's limits but retains a watchful eye in case you blink at the wrong moment.

The real key to the Speciale's magic is that all this technology melds seamlessly with the driver's inputs, augmenting talent but never detracting involvement. Will another 50kg because of the folding roof mechanism, plus a slightly higher

centre of gravity and the inevitable reduction in structural integrity create a disconnect between driver and the way the car deconstructs a road? Erm, I doubt it. But it pays to keep an open mind in this business so we head to 'our road', a home away from home about 80 miles from Maranello, intent on finding out. Oh, and to soak in the response, noise and almost unbelievable ferocity of that normally aspirated V8 until we drown in it.

Of course, I mean that figuratively. Sadly, somebody has taken me literally and Italy is under a rain cloud more menacing than the spectre of

a Ferrari SUV. The roads really are drowning. On the autostrada there's sign of a brightening sky, but it's just a tease. The rain is here to stay. Still, the Speciale A tracks straight and true through the deep standing water. The Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres really are a world away from those early M3 CSL-spec tyres that forced BMW to devise a legal disclaimer for customers who chose to fit them. They inspire complete confidence even at Brit-abroad-in-somebody-else's-car speeds. The Speciale A also exhibits the same supremely supple but controlled ride as the coupe and there's

little discernible shimmy or shake with the roof in place on relatively smooth autostrada. So far, so much the same.

In fact, that's not quite true as there's one stark difference: the noise. All the Speciales we've driven have been deafeningly loud under anything other than a tickle of throttle. Even at a gentle cruise the noise never really abates and although we all like to think that louder is always better, in truth it's pretty wearing and – dare I say this – the noise isn't even that nice. However, this Speciale A is maybe only 70 per cent as loud under load



‘You get such a precise picture of the chassis’ grip and balance that confidence builds quickly’

and could almost be described as refined on part-throttle. The note is also sweeter and more tuneful. Later I’ll be told the exhaust was ‘turned down a bit for the open car’ to stop it becoming ‘unbearable’. Of course there’s still plenty of tyre roar, but overall this boring section of the journey is all the more enjoyable for the reduced decibels.

As the Futa Pass starts to climb and coil, that enjoyment only intensifies. The Speciale A has lost its roof and some stiffness, but it hasn’t lost any of its ability to entertain. The super-fast steering is weighty enough to lean up against,

and the load through it shifts as the front tyres seek out grip on the sopping wet, leaf-strewn surface. You get such a precise picture of the chassis’ grip and balance that confidence builds quickly. In these conditions the Speciale A’s incredible beyond-the-limit poise is easily accessed for those who look for it, but the real magic is in how the electronic systems allow you to exploit so much of its potential with no fear and without heavy-handed intervention.

Select Wet on the manettino and the grip and traction the Special A finds is spooky. One more click

Opposite page and above: cabin remains largely dry when the car is on the move, so no interiors were harmed in the making of this Driven. Marvel at how the Speciale A copes with these conditions in our video review at youtube.com/evotv



‘There’s no question that the 499 people eagerly awaiting their new toy will not be disappointed’

to Sport in combination with the ‘bumpy road mode’ is probably the sweet spot today, allowing the car to be manipulated around its limits without ever slithering away beyond them. Once you connect with the car’s steering and reactions it’s tempting to click further to Race or CST Off – thereby bringing the Side Slip angle Control system to the party – but the downshifts are so aggressive that the rear axle feels like it might lock on the way into corners. Why tread that fine line when Sport mode creates such a wide, softly curved ledge on which to express yourself?

The rest of the dynamic flavour is pure Speciale, from the superbly firm but progressive brakes, the scintillating engine (I might just shed a tear when the 458T arrives) and the sense of absolute clarity, to the way it responds to your inputs and to the road surface itself. Is anything lost when you stow the neat metal

roof? In this weather, on these roads, it’s hard to pinpoint a huge amount of flex or a reduction in body control because of the retuned suspension. Meanwhile, the wind (and rain) adds to the sensory overload without becoming horribly intrusive.

However, a word of caution: in the UK the standard 458 Spider feels vastly more wobbly than the carbon-tubbed McLaren 650S. The Speciale A has no more bracing than the Spider so expect plenty of flex on poor surfaces and a little reduction in the precision so intrinsic to the coupe. For me the coupe will always be the one because I’d always choose pure dynamism over a bit of wind in the hair. But having said that, there’s no question that the 499 people eagerly awaiting their new toy will not be disappointed. The Speciale A is, rather predictably, jaw-dropping. **X**

Jethro Bovingdon
(@JethroBovingdon)

ALTERNATIVE CONVERTIBLE SUPERCARS



Lamborghini Aventador LP700-4 Roadster

Rather than a folding top, the big Lambo comes with a two-part removable lid. The 690bhp 6.5-litre V12-engined supercar is good for 0-62mph in 3.0sec and 217mph.



McLaren 650S Spider

Its innovative carbon tub means the 641bhp Spider weighs just 40kg more than the coupe and maintains structural rigidity. It also matches the coupe’s 3.0sec 0-62mph time.



Aston Vanquish Volante

What better way to fully enjoy a 12-cylinder Aston Martin soundtrack than by dropping the soft-top on a 568bhp Vanquish Volante? Pin the throttle and it’ll hit 62mph in 4.0sec.



Lamborghini Huracán Spyder

Whilst Lambo remains tight-lipped, you can expect a Spyder version of the 602bhp Huracán to be along soon, most likely with a folding soft-top.



RUF Rt35 Roadster

Porsche tuner RUF has extracted 621bhp from a twin-turbo 3.8-litre flat-six. Despite the added weight of a folding electric soft-top, the Rt 35 Roadster tops out at 210mph.

Specification

Engine	CO2	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
V8, 4497cc	275g/km	597bhp @ 9000rpm	398lb ft @ 6000rpm	3.0sec (claimed)	199mph (claimed)	1445kg (420bhp/ton)	£228,682

+ Same incisive dynamics and fluidity, fantastic balance, a bit less shouty **-** Roof inevitably reduces precision slightly, chassis flex on bumpy surfaces

evo rating ★★★★★

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The mpg figures quoted are sourced from official EU-regulated test results obtained through laboratory testing, are provided for comparability purposes and may not reflect your actual driving experience. Retail sales only, subject to vehicle availability for vehicles registered between 01.10.14 and 31.12.14 at participating dealers. T&C apply. *0% APR finance available on all all-new Mazda3 models over 24, 30, 36 or 42 months. **You will not own the vehicle until all payments are made.** Finance subject to status, 18s or over. Guarantee/Indemnity may be required. Mazda Financial Services RH1 1SR. Model shown: All-new Mazda3 120ps Sport Nav, OTR from £20,195. Model shown features optional Soul Red Metallic paint (£660). OTR price includes VAT, number plates, delivery, 12 months' road fund licence, first registration fee, 3 year or 60,000 mile warranty and 3 years' European roadside assistance. Test drives subject to applicant status and availability. Details correct at time of going to print. Not available in conjunction with any other offer unless specified.



Nissan 370Z Nismo

Test location: B660, Cambridgeshire, UK GPS: 52.38101, -0.39229

IF YOU'VE GOT a drop of petrol in your veins then any road car bearing the name of Nissan's motorsport division should make your heart beat a little faster. Exciting and intriguing in equal measures, a Nismo badge signifies something beyond the norm. That's not to say all the ninja-spec Nissans are a shoo-in for your affections. The GT-R Nismo is hobbled by overly stiff suspension and priced at a premium that puts it beyond the reach of all but the most diehard fan, while the Juke Nismo is a bit softcore to convincingly deliver on the Nismo promise. However, the 370Z Nismo promises to be the

Still a lot more money than the standard Z, can the latest Nismo version justify the extra expense?

Photography: Dean Smith

sweet spot of the range.

There's no denying the Z is getting a bit long in the tooth, but this updated Nismo version serves as a timely reminder that a muscular front-engined, rear-drive coupe is a recipe with enduring appeal. It doesn't seem like that long since the first 370Z Nismo went on sale, but in true Japanese fashion it's already been subject to a number of detail design and engineering updates.

Visually this refreshed model is more in line with its big brother,

the GT-R Nismo. A muscular body kit and distinctive red accents are unmistakable Nismo trademarks. Black headlamp bezels, new LED daytime running lights and larger air intakes give the Z a more aggressive face, while new black and silver 19in Rays alloy wheels fill the exaggerated wheelarches to perfection. The aero package itself has been tweaked (via a reshaped front bumper and smaller rear wing) to achieve greater overall downforce and a more even balance front to rear. Nissan goes so

far as to claim the Nismo Z has more downforce than any sector rival.

Inside, the Z's cockpit is dominated by a pair of new Recaro seats. Trimmed in red and black leather and Alcantara, they are built around a shell structure rather than a tubular structure, so they're lighter and more rigid. Greater adjustment and increased support also makes them more comfortable. Deeply recessed dials and heavily hooded binnacles lend the Z an old-school ambience, while the strict two-seater layout gives it a focus and purity that a token 2+2 arrangement couldn't match, so although you can't dupe your wife with the promise that there's room for the



Left: substantial dry-surface grip partly offset by a lack of suspension pliancy. **Above:** rear wing is more subtle than last Z Nismo's. **Right:** big V6 has to be thrashed to bring it to life. **Far right:** cabin has superb seats



‘The V6 would benefit from being more exuberant, to live up to the expectation set by the extrovert styling’

kids, the upside is there's decent luggage space for a long weekend.

As you'd expect, the Nismo is a more aggressive proposition than the regular Z, but Nissan has addressed criticism that the original Nismo lacked compliance and refinement by revising the rear spring and damper rates and introducing new inner wheelarch liners and carpets to absorb road noise. These measures have achieved some level of success, but the car still lacks the refinement of a Golf GTI or M235i. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but if you're used to more grown-up machinery the lack of isolation from road and mechanical noise will challenge you a little.

The heart of the 370Z Nismo remains its 3.7-litre V6. No different to the outgoing model's, and in all honesty little different from the regular Z's, that means peak power and torque outputs of 339bhp at 7400rpm and 274lb ft at 5200rpm respectively – up 16bhp and 400rpm, and 6lb ft at the same revs, compared with the non-Nismo 370Z. Those are respectable figures, but the Z is a relatively chunky 1535kg, so the Nismo works with a power-to-weight ratio of 224bhp per ton. That's the same as an M235i and roughly halfway between a Cayman and a Cayman S. For context, the GT-R Nismo has around 50 per cent more horsepower to propel every kilo

but asks for more than three times the money for the privilege.

The Nismo Z only comes in coupe form with a six-speed manual, so there's no doubting its credentials as a pure drivers' car. This sets the tone for what is a very simple and transparent driving experience. The big V6 starts with the push of a button and settles into a lusty idle. It's not vocal in the contemporary, contrived sense. Indeed, it would benefit from being more exuberant, to live up to the expectation set by the extrovert styling.

The control weights are reassuringly substantial, the ride no-nonsense firm but with enough low-speed compliance to suggest



it'll work on real roads. There's a barrel-chested swagger to the way the Nismo Z goes about its business, with plenty of part-throttle response and urgency. The steering responds with encouraging immediacy: a roll of the wrists is all that's needed to peel into fast- and medium-speed corners. In the wet you're quickly mindful that the front-end responds more rapidly than the rear-end can support, but in the dry you can lean on the nose with greater conviction and trust in the available traction and inherent balance of the chassis.

It's an indication of the Z's character that you only need to push the traction control for a moment for it to disengage. No nanny-ing multi-stage 'Are you sure?' intermediate modes, just a single 'Yes, I'm willing to take responsibility' switch from a reliance on an electronic safety net to sensory, synaptic control. Circumspection is prudent in the rain, but dry roads require a more robust approach. The ride is busy and the Z is constantly deflected off-course on bumpy

'The ride is busy, but if you're prepared to boss it around, the Nismo comes alive in entertaining fashion'

Above: Nismo styling tweaks certainly give the Z renewed presence, which if you've paid £10k more than the standard car you might consider important

roads, albeit only slightly, but if you're prepared to boss it around, the Nismo comes alive in entertaining fashion. A standard limited-slip diff means it'll slide when provoked, but the diff could be faster to react: as it stands there's a delay between getting into the throttle, the diff locking and the tail beginning to slide. Consequently the transition between grip and slip feels like a clutch kick rather than being smoothly progressive. The Z therefore lacks delicacy and precision compared with a (slower) Toyota GT86 or a (classier) Cayman.

An area of disappointment is the 3.7 V6. Undeniably effective, yet never less than coarse, it feels and sounds reluctant to rev much beyond 6000rpm, even though the red line suggests you've got the best part of 2000rpm left to play with. Aurally there's little pleasure to be had from working it harder, but persevere and the rewards are there in terms of pace. The gearing is tall, but more playful than a Cayman's, and you have the option of an annoyingly sweet rev-match mode that activates a

throttle-blip function (something Nissan pioneered). The motor might lack sparkle and an appetite for revs, but there's no doubt the Nismo Z ups its game when wrung-out.

At a little short of £38k the Nismo Z is a big chunk more money than the car on which it's based, but the fact a standard Z represents great value compared with a GT86 distorts the picture slightly. The Nismo is also a couple of grand cheaper than a bum-basic Cayman and £11k less than an un-optioned Cayman S. If you're prepared to look beyond the coupe genre, the more rapid and infinitely more practical Golf R is £7k cheaper.

That might sound like a cold and calculating assessment of what is an unashamedly emotive and charismatic car, but the 370Z Nismo relies on you buying into its niche appeal. It looks the part, but it either needs sweeter, heavier under-bonnet ordnance or a more pliant, fluid chassis – preferably both – to commend it to a wider audience. **X**

Richard Meaden
(@DickieMeaden)

Specification

Engine	CO2	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
V6, 3696cc	248g/km	339bhp @ 7400rpm	274lb ft @ 5200rpm	5.2sec (claimed)	155mph (limited)	1535kg (224bhp/ton)	£37,575

+ Sharper looks, improved ride and refinement, pure and simple thrills **-** Engine needs more sparkle, chassis lacks ultimate precision; fighting a tough price-point

evo rating

★★★★★

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Jaguar F-type Coupe

The entry-level F-type may lack the grunt of its siblings, yet it can still beguile



W E'VE WRITTEN A lot about Jaguar's coolest car but most of it can be summed up in four statements. The F-type Coupe is one of the best-looking cars on the planet. The F-type V8 R Coupe is so good it blitzed this year's eCoty field, bowing only to the sublime Ferrari 458 Speciale. The F-type V6 S Coupe makes a variously wonderful substitute if you can't stretch to an R. And the entry-level F-type V6 Coupe... well, until now we haven't bothered to find out.

Rather telling, don't you think? And it's clearly the case: the plainest and most affordable F-type doesn't bring anything to the party the other two poster stars can't trump with interest. It's down on power and chassis sophistication (it doesn't have the adaptive damping and mechanical/active limited-slip diffs of the S and R models) and if you don't specify bigger wheels from the options list, comes on relatively puny 18-inchers. It doesn't look quite right on 18s so, unsurprisingly, our test car was supplied with sexier 19in Orbit Black and Diamond Turned alloy wheels (£1750) and quite a few other

not unreasonable goodies besides, taking a base price of £51,250 out to £59,850. Perhaps the only nagging problem here is that a Porsche Cayman GTS costs £55,397.

Indeed, it's tempting to ask – accepting that a range has to start somewhere – why bother? But it very quickly becomes obvious after only a few miles that, neutered or not, there's no such thing as a disappointing F-type Coupe.

If your budget is close to snapping at £50k and only an F-type Coupe will do, it's easy enough to make the case. Even in 'mild' tune, that supercharged 3-litre V6 – also slated for the hottest version of Jaguar's XE saloon – develops 335bhp and 332lb ft of torque (down 40bhp and 7lb ft on the S). Directed to the rear wheels via ZF's brilliant eight-speed automatic, the combination dials up 0-60mph in 5.1sec on the way to a top speed of 161mph. Enough to keep all but the most determined hot hatch drivers in their place.

Much of the F-type's feel-good personality and demonstrative sportiness remain intact, too. It fires up with an explosive bark and gratuitous flare of revs before



settling to a throaty idle. And there's a real sense of energy and attack in the way it picks up the pace at even quite modest throttle openings. The soundtrack doesn't suffer too grievously either. The switchable sports exhaust from the S and R is standard and if the V6 doesn't sound quite as fruity as it does in S form, it's no less vocal and retains the full retinue of crackling ballistics on the overrun, the hollow pops sounding not unlike a battery-powered toy monkey banging away on the bongos.

It's when you put your toe down, though, that it doesn't quite happen. At least it doesn't if you've previously driven an S. That car's almost eye-wateringly waspish top end isn't replicated here. To its credit, the lesser V6 F-type pulls strongly

through to the red line, sounding somewhat faster than it actually is, but it never quite nails the visceral thrills of the S.

Accept that and it does nothing else to diminish the F-type Coupe's high-flying reputation. The chassis might not have trick dampers or a limited-slip diff, but the fast, direct steering, anchored front end and reassuringly tied-down agility are all present and correct. As with its more expensive and powerful stablemates, it's a car that loves to be taken by the scruff and hustled. And although it's wide and quite heavy, it never feels it. The absence of slack in its responses and the sheer precision with which it can be placed on the road are remarkable. The ride quality's pretty good, too – certainly a little more rounded and forgiving than that of the S.

So no, the basic F-type Coupe isn't the range makeweight it might first seem. It's a very good car with most of the charm and performance of the S and a marginally better ride, for £8k less. Drive the S first, though, and I suspect you'll work out a way to find the extra. **x**

David Vivian (@davidjvivian)

Specification

Engine	CO2	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
V6, 2995cc, supercharger	205g/km	335bhp @ 6500rpm	332lb ft @ 3500-5000rpm	5.3sec (claimed)	161mph (claimed)	1577kg (216bhp/ton)	£51,250

+ Drop-dead looks, brilliant chassis, desirability **-** Engine lacks top-end fight

evo rating ★★★★★



Mini Cooper SD 5-door

Test location: B671, Cambridgeshire, UK GPS: 52.525964, -0.395347

THE FIVE-DOOR Mini is based on the three-door, rather than the Countryman.

So there's a positive straight out the box. The wheelbase has been extended by 72mm (but the difference this makes on rear legroom is negligible), and at 278 litres the boot is 67 litres larger than the three-door's. For comparison, a five-door Golf has a 380-litre boot and a five-door Polo crams in 280 litres. Six five-door Mini variants are available, ranging from One to Cooper S, covering three petrol and three diesel engines from BMW's latest generation of three- and four-cylinder units. Prices start at £14,350 for the boggo One (£600 more than the three-door) and rise to £20,050 for the Cooper SD – the car we have on test here.

You sit low in the Mini, on a firm but supportive seat. You grab the chunky wheel and note the familiar exaggerated interior styling. Build quality is strong, there's appealing weight to the controls and visibility is good. The huge circular centre display, an upsized throwback to the

original Mini's speedo, comfortably houses infotainment and satnav, but its positioning means you take your eyes off the road for longer than is comfortable to select destinations or operate the hi-fi. This can be mitigated somewhat by an optional (£375) head-up display.

It takes, oh, about 50 yards for you to recognise the familiar Mini driving DNA. The wheelbase may be longer and weight up by around 60kg, but you could drive this car blindfolded and know it's a Mini. The steering delivers strong feel and a controlled urgency that could only be Mini, and the handling has still clearly been tuned by someone who knows how to have fun. The same small movements from the rear end are carried over from the three-door (this is resolutely not a locked-down rear axle like a Golf's), which in turn makes for a pleasantly involving driving experience.

The SD engine – a 2-litre four-cylinder diesel – is very capable. A twin-scroll turbo pushes peak torque to a strong 265lb ft, resulting in performance that will frighten all but the quickest hot hatches. This

Mini hatchback gains an extra pair of doors. But have the dynamics remained intact?

Photography: Aston Parrott



engine is also refined, and extremely frugal. The choice between it and the petrol equivalent is not the foregone conclusion you'd imagine.

The suspension is firm – some will find it 'sporting', others 'uncomfortable'. The ride is stiffer than that of the majority of this car's rivals, but it's rarely crashy. Tyre roar, however, can be intrusive.

Directional stability is marginally improved by the longer wheelbase. Push too hard and a well-resolved ESP system subtly keeps things in check, while an electronic diff delivers strong traction without impeding progress.

Unlike the Countryman or the Paceman, the Mini five-door still feels like a scamp. Its weightier

controls, firm dynamics, overall agility and sense of fun all conspire to deliver an enjoyable drive when the mood takes. Some of the styling features are overwrought, and it's hard not to cringe at the mood lighting and some of the signposting (select Sport mode and 'maximum go-kart feel' appears on the central screen), but overall the Mini five-door loses little to the three-door in terms of spirit.

The question you need to ask is whether the modest gains in overall practicality warrant choosing it over the three-door. Or in other words, how often do you carry rear-seat passengers, and how often will you fill all 278 litres in the boot? ☒

Nick Trott (@evoNickTrott)

Specification

Engine	CO2	Power	Torque	0-62mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
In-line 4-cyl, 1995cc, turbodiesel	109g/km	168bhp @ 4000rpm	265lb ft @ 1500-2750rpm	7.4sec (claimed)	140mph (claimed)	1230kg (139bhp/ton)	£20,050

➕ Driving experience very close to a three-door Mini's ➖ The three-door looks better

evo rating ★★★★★



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Revo Golf R

Test location: Whiston Road, Northamptonshire, UK **GPS:** 52.240073, -0.764411

TWO SIGNIFICANT things happened in the automotive world in 1974. At one end of the scale VW launched its hatchback for the people, the eminently sensible Golf. At the other end, Lamborghini unleashed the monstrous Countach supercar. The motoring landscape must have seemed so vibrant and expansive at the time.

Forty years later, you can pick up a seventh generation Golf in range-topping R spec for £30K, pop over to Revo in Brackley, fork out a little bit more and then, on your way home, rocket to 60mph in 3.7 seconds. That's two whole seconds faster than that Countach could manage. You'd have been sectioned for suggesting as much in 1974.

Incredibly, Revo's upgrades comprise just a remap and a set of sticky tyres. On the best forecourt fuel the stage one software, which costs £719, lifts peak power from 296 to 371bhp, while torque climbs by 80 points to 360lb ft. This must be the cheapest way to crack 100mph in nine seconds in a new car.

Since recording those ludicrous

figures this demo car has been fitted with a high-flow intake kit (£359), Bilstein B16 adjustable coilovers (£1556) and meatier brakes (£2154), including four-pot Alcon calipers and Revo's own ventilated discs. The tyres are Dunlop SP Sport Maxx Race (£267 each at blackcircles.com), which are about as uncompromising as road rubber gets.

The four-cylinder turbo engine still has that warbly, offbeat sound at idle evocative of old Subarus. Once on the move it makes the most remarkable range of snorting, hissing and rushing noises, sounding for all the world like a snoring dinosaur. The remap and intake kit give Volkswagen's four-pot plenty of character, then, but also a broader, more muscular strength throughout the rev range.

Those acceleration figures, though, are a little misleading. With four-wheel drive and those sticky tyres warmed through, the thing just bounces off the line, but that initial rate of launch acceleration – derived from traction as much as sheer power – doesn't necessarily translate into supercar-baiting

Brackley-based tuner endows the top Golf with 371bhp – and 0-60mph in 3.7sec

Photography: Aston Parrott



in-gear performance.

Having said that, the Dunlops find so much purchase on a dry road that in point-to-point driving the Revo R might just give a Porsche 911 something to think about. They afford enormous turn-in and mid-corner grip, and they even give the steering – already excellent in the standard car – a heightened sense of precision and feel. However, they are totally unsuited to wet or greasy roads, the loss of grip being sudden and unannounced.

The bigger brakes, meanwhile, go some way to answering one of the few criticisms of the factory Golf R – the lengthening of the middle pedal in sustained, hard use – since they resist fade more effectively and still

return very crisp and transparent pedal feel. While the brakes are easy to recommend, the value of the Bilstein suspension depends rather more on personal preference. There's no doubt the more focused set-up improves the Golf R's agility and precision, removing some of the roll and lean of the standard model. On smooth roads, that makes the car feel more alive and exciting, and although the ride quality in day-to-day driving is still acceptable, there is a loss of pliancy on rougher sections when pressing on. An uneven surface throws quite a lot of movement into the body, which makes the Revo Golf less effective than the standard car. It's worth noting that the dampers on this car were set to medium, leaving scope to soften the set-up.

Revo's engine and brake upgrades are easy to endorse; the extreme tyres and firmer suspension less so. There's still more to come, though. The Revo guys are working on a stage two kit that will include an exhaust system, uprated intercooler and revised fuelling. Just in case 3.7 to 60 isn't quick enough... x

Dan Prosser (@TheDanProsser)

Specification

Engine	CO2	Power	Torque	0-60mph	Top speed	Weight	Basic price
In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbo	n/a	371bhp @ 5700rpm	360lb ft @ 3000rpm	3.7sec (claimed)	160mph (est)	1495kg (252bhp/ton)	See main text

➕ Straight-line performance; braking; value ➖ Tyres and suspension rob some useability **evo rating** ★★★★★

Watches

This month, Porsche Design's first self-made piece, another Big Bang and an official-to-the-UK Tudor

Words: Simon de Burton

1 Porsche Design Timepiece No. 1

From: porsche-design.com **Price:** £4900

Porsche Design was launched in 1972 and made its initial watch range with Orfina, before partnering with IWC and creating the world's first all-black watch (as worn by Bodie in *The Professionals*). In recent years PD's timepieces have been made by Eterna, but it has now brought its watchmaking in-house, starting with the aptly named Timepiece No. 1. Initially offered only in black, the 42mm chronograph will later be available in an array of colours based on Porsche's paint palette for its cars. Guards Red, anyone? Speed Yellow?

2 Hublot Big Bang Ferrari Ceramic Carbon

From: hublot.com **Price:** £20,600

Hublot has created yet another variation on the theme of its Big Bang Ferrari watch in the form of this 45mm black ceramic effort topped with a carbonfibre bezel. The open-work dial features luminous markings in Ferrari 'Giallo Fly' (or something a bit like it) and provides a glimpse of Hublot's in-house Unico automatic, flyback chronograph movement. The yellow detailing is picked up in the stitching of the strap, which can be had in either rubber or Schedoni leather. The watch is limited to 1000 examples.

3 Tudor Heritage Chronograph

From: tudorwatch.com **Price:** £3010

We've tried to tempt you with watches by Tudor once or twice before in these pages, each time on the basis that you would have to 'import' one, since the affordable Rolex sister brand wasn't officially sold in the UK (a remarkable 98 per cent of its production previously went to China). Well, all that changed in September when Tudor became available from more than 100 outlets around the British Isles – which leaves little excuse for not tracking down a Heritage Chrono Blue drivers' watch, preferably on a matching fabric strap.

Now & then



NOW

IWC Ingenieur Lewis Hamilton

Worn by: Lewis Hamilton

As part of its deal with the Mercedes F1 team, IWC allowed Lewis to design his own version of the Ingenieur. In addition to Hamilton's own watch, 250 are for sale, each priced at £11,250.



THEN

Longines stopwatch

Used by: Donald Campbell

His father, Sir Malcolm, might have been a Rolex man, but land and water speed record holder Donald was usually timed by Longines equipment. The firm verified many of his records, including those set at Ullswater, Coniston Water, Hallwill, Lake Eyre and Lake Dumbleyung.



Watch tech

Patek Philippe Grandmaster Chime

Patek Philippe has marked its 175th anniversary by launching the most complicated wristwatch it has ever made – and it costs a cool £2m.

Comprising 1580 separate components – 1366 for the movement and 214 for the 47mm case – the Grandmaster Chime boasts 20 complications, four more than the 'Tour de L'Île' made by Vacheron Constantin to mark its 250th anniversary in 2005. (The most complicated watch, period, however, is still the Aeternitas Mega 4 from Franck Muller, with a claimed 35 functions.)

Among the features of the double-faced Grandmaster Chime are grande and petite sonnerie chimes (which automatically sound on the hour and quarter hour), a minute repeater (which, at the push of a button, chimes the hour, quarter hour and minutes since the quarter hour), an 'instantaneous' perpetual calendar with a four-digit display that changes on the stroke of midnight, a second time zone and – a first on a wristwatch – a repeater that sounds the date on demand.

The case of the watch is almost as impressive as the movement. The back and front are shaped identically so it is equally comfortable to wear with either of the two dials on display. Made from rose gold, it is hand-engraved with an intricate leaf design – and discreetly inscribed with symbols to remind the wearer how to operate all those functions.



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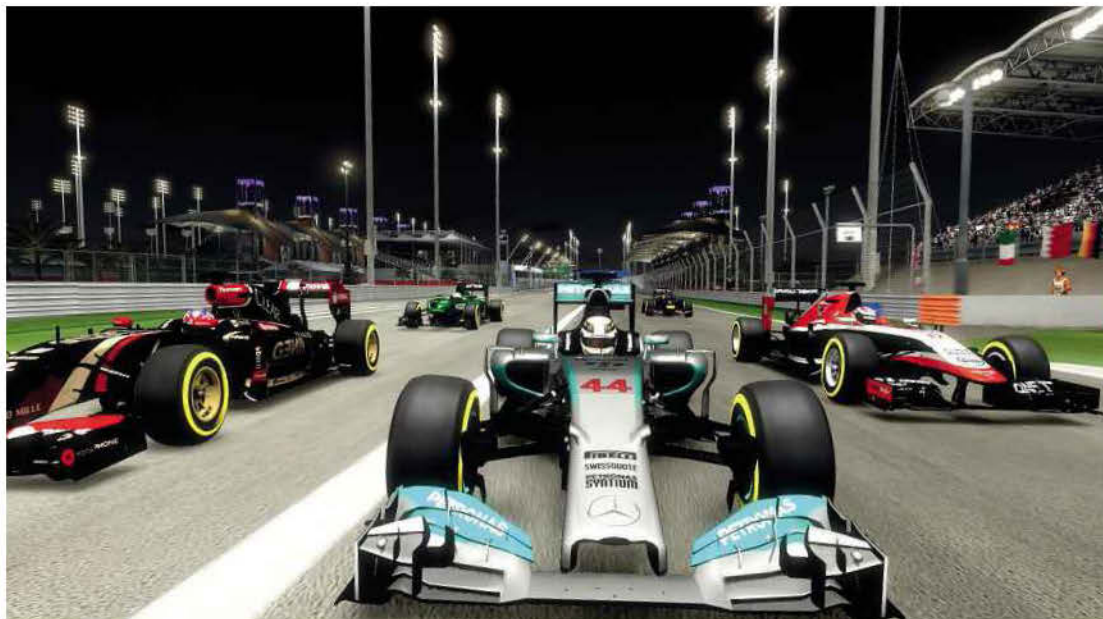
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Simulations

The latest news, kit and reviews from the world of driving games

Words: Antony Ingram



Peripheral



FANATEC CLUBSPORT PORSCHE 918 RSR STEERING WHEEL

Price: €399.95 (c£312)

From: fanatec.com

Wheel and pedal peripherals have come a long way in recent years. Where once racing games could be completed with a plastic yoke that rocked a few degrees side to side and pedals more like those of a sewing machine, the latest set-ups have 900 degrees of rotation, realistic force feedback, tactile gearchange paddles and pedals with realistic weighting. Some, such as Fanatec's Porsche 918 RSR replica wheel, take the concept to extremes. It is, to all intents and purposes, identical to the wheel found in Porsche's race-biased 918 – right down to the 320mm brown leather rim, inset shift lights and quick-release mechanism. It doesn't come cheap and nor does it include the £469 ClubSport base (seen above) and £195's worth of ClubSport pedals (plus shipping) that you'll also need...

Game

F1 2014

Price: £34.99 **Format:** PS3, Xbox 360, PC

From: formulal-game.com

THE TIMING OF Formula 1 games always seems a little inopportune. While fans of other sports get officially branded titles before their respective seasons even start, those wishing to play along with the F1 season only got access to Codemasters' latest title in mid-October.

In a sport where regulations change so quickly, drivers have different helmet designs every race and entire teams vanish down the financial plughole, *F1 2014* is already out of date before it even hits the shelves.

Its team and driver line-ups are all representative of 2014's opening roster, you can race the new turbocharged cars, and circuits such as Sochi and

the revitalised Red Bull Ring make an appearance. So far, so expected. But other changes mean the game appears something of a poor relation to last year's title.

For one, the chance to drive historic Formula 1 cars around historic grand prix circuits has gone. When *F1 2013* largely amounts to an update of *F1 2012* rather than an all-new game, removing such an appealing feature feels like a large step in the wrong direction.

In aiming at less committed F1 gamers, Codemasters has also dialled back the difficulty options. If a full season seems too strenuous, for example, seven and 12-race options are also available, though hardcore F1 fans

can still tackle the full season and pick from Career, Rivals and Scenario game modes for varying levels of challenge.

It could be argued the new Career mode options attract the casual player, but casual players will surely be deterred by the game's relatively realistic handling and all will be put off by the reduction in content compared with *F1 2013*.

The new physics engine makes *F1 2014* a more suitable game for those playing with gamepads rather than a wheel and pedals combination. Where *F1 2013* felt twitchy, *F1 2014* is a little easier to get to grips with.

People new to the genre will still spend plenty of time acquainting

themselves with tyre walls from around the world, but stick with it and there's joy to be had from the realistic handling, accurately modelled circuits and the spectacular carnage created when Maldonado's digital doppelgänger ploughs into you for the umpteenth time.

Invest in a wheel and pedals set-up and there's an extra layer of satisfaction to the game not possible with a joypad, and the great graphics provide appreciable immersion. But *F1 2013* did too, and if you're not bothered about having the latest tracks and 2014's arguably neutered cars, the older title's classic modes and lower price make the new game a hard sell.



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F10 535D » 358 BHP
335i/135i/X6 » 370+ BHP (+DE-LIMIT)
123D » 252 BHP
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Outside Line

by RICHARD MEADEN



Lotus under the patronage of Volkswagen – now there's a way that the Norfolk sports car maker could really unlock its full potential

WILL SOMEBODY PLEASE SAVE LOTUS? That might sound like an odd question given the company has finally emerged – blinking, mildly paranoid and bathed in cold sweat – from the automotive acid trip that was the Bahar era. Yet

news that the new boss, Jean-Marc Gales, is completing a round of redundancies and cost cuts leaves me with a heavy heart.

Not because I think such actions are unnecessary – 1200 employees producing 1200 cars per annum is an ugly equation – but because the conservative survival plan appears to rely on people like us having a continued appetite for yet more evolutions of the current range. Of equal concern is the fact that, as Gales readily concedes, this purgatorial process of slow growth is predicted to take three years, which means the recovery also relies on the brilliant people who remain at Hethel having the appetite to stick around.

I don't envy Gales. There are no quick fixes and there's only so much anyone could do with the hand he's been dealt. God knows someone had to administer a cold slap to a business left with a tragic balance sheet, wilfully neglected existing product line and decimated dealer network. That Gales has spared us the bullshit, rolled up his sleeves and got on with restoring Lotus to something approaching an even keel is encouraging. What worries me is whether he's being allowed to do enough.

We'll never know how close Lotus came to sinking in the turbulent storm of controversy surrounding Bahar's dismissal after parent company Proton was bought from the Malaysian government by DRB-Hicom. The financial lockdown that becalmed Lotus in the aftermath were dark days, but thankfully the Exige S – dismissed as an irksome distraction by Bahar and crew – emerged from the wreckage and found buyers. Combined with continued interest in the Elise and increased confidence amongst dealers and customers, sales rose from a pitiful 70 units in 2012 to the current 1200 a year.

Of course, the highest profile casualty in all this (apart from Bahar) is the long-awaited Esprit. It certainly wouldn't have been a panacea for all Lotus's ills, but it was the only credible car of the Infamous Five. Perhaps not a searing Ferrari 458 beater, nor as complete as the Audi R8, but a refreshingly desirable alternative to the established players and a means of propelling Lotus into an elite and – presumably – more profitable area of the market without requiring huge sales. Sadly, we'll never know.

What we do know is that by failing to bring that car to market, Lotus has effectively erased all evidence of the Bahar era. Perhaps that's the idea. Or perhaps the Esprit wasn't quite as production-

ready as we think. I suspect a pinch of both is probably nearer the truth, but at a much more fundamental level I worry that the cause of Lotus's current stasis is DRB-Hicom lacking the wherewithal to be decisive and do what's necessary to enable Lotus to thrive rather than merely survive. Basing a business on smoke, mirrors, Sharon Stone and an undeliverable model strategy was madness, but it's also true that palliative care can only do so much when what the patient really needs is a cure.

I'm not blind to the shortcomings of the cars or the company, but as a driver the Elise and Exige still hold strong appeal, and I find it impossible not to want the best for Lotus. I'll admit 'the best' is a somewhat nebulous concept, so I'll nail my colours to the mast now and say I wish VW would step in and show the

'Basing a business on smoke, mirrors, Sharon Stone and an undeliverable model strategy was madness'

Malaysians what they've been squandering all these years.

Think about it. With VW's patronage anything's possible, the best exemplar being Bugatti. Without Ferdinand Piech's sheer force of will and VW's unflinching commitment to bankrolling what for years seemed like an insane act of folly and ego, Bugatti would have remained defunct. Yet VW took a deep breath, set itself an apparently insurmountable engineering challenge and created the Veyron. In so doing it took the brand from the dusty pages of history to a position of pre-eminence in one giant leap. That Bugatti almost certainly continues to cost VW a fortune doesn't matter: arguably a marque such as Bugatti has to be a money-no-object exercise. It needn't be the case with Lotus.

As an authentic maker of lightweight sports cars, and with multiple World Championship-winning F1 pedigree, surely Lotus is the one jewel missing from VW's crown. Acquire Lotus and Porsche's diversification could be confined to sporting saloons and SUVs, Lamborghini would be left to fight Ferrari, Bentley to focus on super-luxury and Bugatti to re-writing the hypercar rule book. And with the stability and creative freedom that comes from VW's unflinching backing, Lotus would build the all-new, genuinely affordable world-beater Hethel so desperately needs, and I for one am so desperate to see. ☒

 @DickieMeaden

Richard is a contributing editor to **evo** and one of the magazine's founding team

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Petrolhead

by RICHARD PORTER



The simple, avoidable irritations in modern cars are the ones that can completely ruin them, fumes a frustrated Porter

I **IF YOU'VE READ LAST MONTH'S CAR** of the Year ultra-feature you'll have seen the disappointing show from the latest BMW M3. It gave the **evo** Brain Trust no pleasure to discover the inelegant, lumpen way with which the strangely charmless M-car relegated itself to a bottom of the table slot. But after two days of intensive driving, failings such as the unsubtle torque delivery, strange steering and hard-to-read handling made the M3 difficult to recommend. For me, however, there are other massive problems with the M3, ones not mentioned in **evo's** away trip to Scotland.

First of all, when you stop, press the button to turn off the engine and open the door to get out, the stereo keeps on playing. This is endemic amongst all current BMWs and Minis and it simply will not do. I don't want to come home late at night and wake my neighbours with the thudding sound of after-dark dance music radio. Nor do I want to arrive home at any time of day and let them know I have been listening to *The Best Of Girls Aloud*. That's a private matter between me and the interior of the M135i I don't own precisely because of this problem. You can stop it by jabbing the start/stop button twice, but in a manual car you've got to take your foot off the clutch first otherwise the engine restarts. Which is tremendously annoying.

There's another problem with the M3 that's also BMW-wide and that's the inability to instantly mirror the side-to-side temperatures on the dual-zone climate control. Say you have a passenger who likes the car to be warmer or cooler than you. They get out and you're driving alone. Many other cars have a system that, with one press of a button, syncs the passenger temp so it falls into the line with your own. BMW, for reasons I can't understand, no longer gives you this option. You have to jab the passenger temperature adjustment until it matches your side, and with every prod at the controls you're reminded of the idiocy of your own weirdly pedantic mind. So yes, I know it's a bit obsessive-compulsive, but driving solo without side-to-side temperature symmetry bothers the bejabbers out of me.

I know I'm not alone on this one, which makes me wonder if anyone at BMW actually drives their own cars. It's a big company, there must be lots of people there, and people who are quite interested in cars. Yet not one of them has ever said, 'You know what, guys? This radio thing and this climate thing, they're really sodding annoying' (but in German, obviously).

The Munichers are not alone, of course. Plenty of cars boast features that seem to have been signed off in the face of all reason. Ever tried to program the satnav in a Ferrari 458? Of course not. If

you had you wouldn't be reading this column. You'd be outside, still trying to program the satnav in a Ferrari 458. Or locked in a room with very soft wallpaper, slowly rocking back and forth muttering, 'The screens. The screens. So many confusing screens.' When I borrowed a 458 and needed to go somewhere unknown, I ended up gumming a TomTom to the dash. The dash of a £178,000 car. Mmm, classy.

The rival offering from McLaren is no better for clattering design idiocy, as discovered during **evo** Car Of The Year testing when anyone over six feet tall tried to get into the 650S. With the standard seats, this car presents the leggier person with two options. One, an uncomfortable knee-bent posture that puts you too close to the dash, the other providing the right amount of leg stretch but forcing the seat back upright against the bulkhead

'When I borrowed a 458 and needed to go somewhere unknown, I ended up gumming a TomTom to the dash'

so you feel like you're sitting in church. Either way, a poor show. More than that, a baffling disappointment. There must be people within McLaren who are reasonably tall, not least Ron Dennis himself. Did nobody mention this?

It goes on. Jaguars with exterior door handles that feel like they're going to snap off. Mercedes-Benzes with auto headlights you can't disable. Lexuses that beep incessantly whenever you drive past the speed camera that you know is there because it's 50 yards from your bloody house. Fords with stereos covered in buttons, not one of which does what is expected of it. **evo's** SEAT Leon long-termers that silences its own DAB radio whenever the heated rear screen is on. Did not one live with these features before putting the cars on sale?

Car makers can pull off some pretty incredible pieces of engineering when they put their minds to it, and come up with ways to build and sell said engineering in a repeatable, reliable mass-produced way. Which makes it all the more baffling that every so often they make a right royal cock of the very basics.

The net result of which is that my neighbours know a little too much about my ongoing love of primary-coloured pop music. ☒

 @sniffpetrol

Richard is **evo's** longest-serving columnist and is also the keyboard behind sniffpetrol.com



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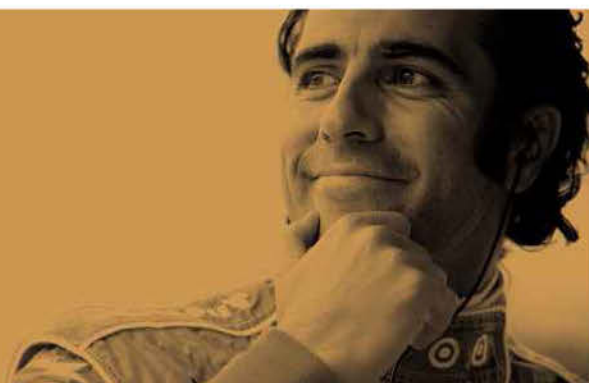
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Champ

by DARIO FRANCHITTI



Almost as though someone tipped him off about what's in this issue of **evo**, Dario reminisces fondly about RC cars

I REMEMBER BEING A KID AND coveting the first remote control car I ever saw, a Tamiya Sand Scorchers – that Baja Beetle thing. Although I didn't buy it at the time, I've had the bug, if you'll pardon the pun, ever since. I remember the first kit I got was when I was about 14. Initially I didn't have the skills or patience to build it, so my dad probably put it together, but when I took it out in the street and ripped it off down the road, one of the back wheels parted company with the car at terminal velocity. We never saw that wheel again.

I don't remember the specific make of that first RC car, but it was a typical off-road buggy and broke quite a lot. Poor manufacturing might have been one of the reasons for this, but to be honest I think I was also a contributing factor. For a start, I remember tinkering with them and learning quite a lot about how to adjust stuff. It was really quite informative, but possibly not brilliant for the longevity of the car. The other thing that probably didn't help was jumping it off progressively larger and larger objects. Having been riding motorbikes since an early age I had some experience building ramps and they were the sort of ambitious kickers that were liable to be lethal to either me or, in this case, the car.

Anyway, after miraculously not killing myself with either the motorbikes or any low-flying RC buggies, I went off and did some racing for a bit and my next experience was on my 22nd birthday. I was racing for Mercedes and after blowing out the candles the team gave me a quarter-scale replica of my DTM car. With a chainsaw engine in it. The thing was absolutely lethal and had so much power that even in a straight line all you were trying to do was just keep it pointing in the right direction. One of the top fuel dragster guys *might* have had an idea how to do it, but all I tended to do was roll the thing over.

The other problem was trying to find somewhere to drive it. I tried to run it on the street outside my parents' house, but when somebody's driving to work in their Fiesta and something blows past them that's quarter scale and sounding like a chainsaw, they tend to get a bit upset with you. Years later I had a driveway long enough to use it on, but the problem there was that you couldn't actually get high enough off the ground to see it for any length of distance and because the thing did 70mph it was out of sight by the time your thumb had twitched on the controller. I may get in trouble for saying this, but really there was only one solution. Jan Magnussen had one too, and we'd drive a road car and chase these quarter-scale DTM cars with one of us hanging out the

sunroof. It was still impossible to control, but it was good fun.

Living in Nashville some years later, I started buying different RC cars that I'd lusted after in my youth. I'd build them (now that I had the patience) and gradually progressed up the ladder to the petrol engine ones, or whatever other funny type of fuel they used. I ended up with a really cool Stratos that, of course, I then had to go and buy all the go-faster bits for. I was continually tweaking and I think that's where I first learned about online shopping. I ended up buying the buggy that had won the last five world championships or something, and then I put in the bigger engine that wasn't supposed to go in it and it all got a bit mental from there. I think those cars are still in the garage in Nashville gathering dust.

'When somebody's driving to work in their Fiesta and something quarter scale blows past them sounding like a chainsaw, they tend to get upset'

Of course it's not just RC cars. I bought a Hot Wheels model of a Guards Red 993 GT2 in a pharmacy in New York the other day because I'm trying to find a die-cast model of every road car I've ever owned. It's an ongoing process, because for me the devil's in the detail: you can get a Porsche 930 no problem, but you can't find an LE. You can find a Porsche Cayenne, but you can't find a dark grey Techart Magnum. I think taking the 1:18 bodyshell off a model and sending it off to get it painted the right colour might be taking things a touch too far. But I can see it happening eventually.

And now it's all coming full circle in the Franchitti clan. My brother Marino's son, Luca, is only 20 months old, but the boy's obsessed with cars. **evo** is his bedtime reading. And now he has discovered model cars. He's got an F40 model, but he doesn't want to just trash it, he wants to look under the engine cover and discover what's going on. It's brilliant to see. I'm already looking forward to building his first RC buggy for him and watching at least two wheels fall off first time out. ☒



@dariofranchitti

Dario is a three-time Indy 500 winner and four-time IndyCar champ

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Inbox

What's nibbled your festive Bakewells this month?



Letter of the Month

Light relief

Finally an affordable sports car that will weigh less than the model it replaces. Mazda should be applauded for making the new MX-5 (*evo* 202) 100kg lighter than the outgoing one. It could have very easily allowed the new model to gain weight with extra gadgets and better safety and then tried to hide it with more power. But it decided to maintain the current engine size and power but reduce weight, which increases the performance and should improve the car in almost every other aspect, including fuel economy and handling.

I love the fact that the new MX-5 is actually physically smaller as well. I hate how modern cars are getting so big and bulky (Renault Clio) – and don't even get me started on the ever-increasing wheel sizes! In my eyes no car needs wheels bigger than 16 inches. They add unnecessary weight and ruin ride quality and feel. I'm also very pleased to see Mazda has decided to get rid of those silly twin-exit exhausts that are just so uncool on a four-cylinder motor.

Matt Slegg



The Letter of the Month wins an Elliot Brown watch

This month's star letter writer receives an Elliot Brown Canford 202-001 (pictured), worth £325. It features a Swiss-made movement with a five-year battery life and a shock-absorption system, has a rotating internal bezel, and comes on a dark blue oiled leather strap.

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Fall of the M Power

I enjoyed eCoty (*evo* 203) but was not surprised that the M3 almost came last. I've owned E46 and E92 versions of the M3. I loved both but preferred the former as I thought its six-cylinder engine was purer and the experience more visceral. I've not driven an F80 and to be honest I don't really want to. It may have the speed and all the flashy systems but it seem to have lost the connection with the driver.

A massive part of this is the engine, which now unfortunately is more like a 911 Turbo's than GT3's; in other words a hairdryer. BMW should have developed the S65 V8 from the E92.

In eCoty 2001 the M3 came second, in 2007 fifth, and this year almost last. 'Progress' indeed!

Francis Carpenter

Picture perfect

Brilliant write-up of eCoty yet again. It's such a pleasure to read a magazine article and actually get a genuine impression as to what the experience of each car really feels like. I have to compliment the photography too, as it adds so much atmosphere and emotion to the feature.

For me the shot of the i8, S1 and Cayman GTS summed up eCoty 2014 perfectly – you couldn't get three more different cars on paper, yet all three represent something close to the pinnacle of driving pleasure. It shows not only how diverse the performance car market is, but also (in the case of the BMW) that the future is very bright. All I can say to other manufacturers now is 'bring it on!'

Dan Wainwright

One step beyond

Great feature on the new Koenigsegg One:1 (*evo* 202). Of all its awesome technology, the one thing that really

struck me was the possibility to fine-tune the car's handling for a circuit like the Nürburgring, section by section, using GPS data.

The latest ZF auto 'box uses GPS to prepare the car for a corner or incline, but Koenigsegg takes this integration of the car's systems to another level. Imagine having optimal suspension settings for every corner and straight on a trackday, then relaxing on the way home with no intervention needed.

Or having the car optimised when you head off the motorway and reach the best roads of north Wales or the Alps.

We grumble now about some of the newest electric steering or adaptive suspension set-ups, but what potential there is here! Just imagine where we might be in 10 years' time as these systems really come together.

Julian Parish

Looks again

It hit home whilst reading the review of the Koenigsegg one:1 that the only remark on the aesthetics of the car were regarding the wing-mirror supports. Now, I'm not saying that the figures of the One:1 aren't mightily impressive, but does this mean that there is too much focus on the raw stats of these machines and not on their visual impact?

Leafing back through your other reviews of the recent crop of hypercars – McLaren P1, Porsche 918 Spyder, LaFerrari – tells a similar story. I'm not saying that such circa-million-pound machines are exactly ugly (apart from maybe the Veyron): the LaFerrari has some nice angles, although only from the front, and the P1 has a forgettable front end but a uniquely futuristic rear. But can we please start focusing more on form rather than just the figures?

Nick Williams



Above: this picture in particular summed up eCoty 2014 for reader Dan Wainwright



Above: amazing tech, says Julian Parish, but what about the looks, asks Nick Williams






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Talking Point

Bentley Conti GT3-R

Last month, we drove the Bentley Continental GT3-R, which claims to be the most focused Bentley road car ever. We also asked: would you consider one over its rivals?

The GT3-R costs nearly as much as the Ferrari F12 and Lamborghini Aventador. I would definitely take the F12 or Aventador, yet I would consider getting the 'regular' Continental GT for around £100k less. Overall, that does everything brilliantly.

Mohammed Naz

I would not consider the GT3-R over anything. To my eyes it looks like a badly modified car. I imagine people would jeer at you in the street for taking an otherwise pleasant luxury vehicle and slapping a cheap spoiler on the back. Great for the Essex elite, I guess. Not for me, though. Likely rivals? Anything from Mansory!

Chris Jones

Seriously looks like it was designed by an aspirational 12-year-old.

robw

I just can't get past the weight of the thing. Plus it's based on a big, heavy luxury car. This is no GT3 RS, so why not lose all the 'racing heritage' crap and stick a big 'limited edition' badge on it instead?

Paul Allen

No, I can't imagine choosing to spend a quarter of a million pounds on one. The 'luxury sports car' is an automotive oxymoron: the more a vehicle is a sports car, the less it is a luxury car, and vice versa. Sports cars are small and intimate; luxury cars give you space to sprawl. Sports cars are finely balanced and instantly responsive; luxury cars are stable and relaxing. Sports cars are light

and full of feedback; luxury cars are thick-walled and isolating. The point of a sports car is to raise your pulse, and the point of a luxury car is to lower it – they are direct opposites.

Tom Westmacott

I appear to be in a minority in liking the appearance. What I don't like is the weight. Rather than lowering the gearing to improve acceleration, I'd rather they lowered the weight further. Ditch the 4WD, lose a few toys and surely it could weigh half a tonne less without feeling too stripped out.

Leslie Brook

Now, what's that saying about putting lipstick on a pig?

McSwede

It's so heavy it generates a measurable gravitational field around the chassis. That said, when I'm 65 I'll have one and I'll be the fastest grandad in town.

Richard Baxter

Not even close. It's my whole car heavier than I would consider reasonable for a 'GT3' car with removed rear seats... No deal.

John Tighe

Yes please. It's one of very few cars that has the right to bear the letters 'GT'. It's not for everyday use, so the new details only make it even more special when you do drive it...

Michael Grigorev

Mitsubishi called. They want their boot spoiler back.

Trey Ely

Join the discussion

Keep an eye on evo.co.uk or follow us on Facebook ([facebook.com/evomagazine](https://www.facebook.com/evomagazine)) to participate in our regular Talking Point debates.

The best comments will be published here each month

Thread of the Month

Marv

Every 911 to go turbo'd?

There have been rumours that, as of the 991.2, there will be no more naturally aspirated 911s...

It is the way forward. I doubt naturally aspirated engines will exist in anything even remotely performance orientated in ten years' time, except perhaps in a few, limited halo models.

DeskJockey

Quick! Someone get me a 4.0 GT3 RS!
Bunta

It's alright, buddy. I don't think they'll start replacing the engines on cars they've already built!

zedleg

I like turbo cars but must admit their demise was one of the reasons I bought my M3. I'm guessing that it, and the epic E60 V10 M5, will be green-taxed into extinction in years to come.

Sheriff

My eyes are dry. I've never enjoyed any of the BMW NA engines, but the N55 in my M135i is a sheer delight. GT3s aside (from the 997 onwards), the 911 NA engines have left me cold too. The GT2 is absolutely epic!

The only two manufacturers who will surely have their DNA diluted are Ferrari and Lamborghini. Although the F40

was pretty epic too... Oh, and I'm not sure a Corvette will ever be better with turbos rather than giant-capacity NA or supercharging.

David_Yu

Are you allergic to throttle response?
caneswell

Even though David's statement is one of personal preference and therefore it should not be possible for it to be wrong, it is just so, so wrong.

duncs500

Unless the laws of physics change, you will never have a turbo-engined car be as keen to respond as an NA car.

GraniteV8

This will no doubt drive the prices of previous-gen NA 911s to ridiculous amounts. To be fair, I have no problem with turbocharging, as long as they don't pump fake noise into the cabin.

Alex_

So if the standard 911 becomes turbocharged, will the 911 Turbo have turbocharged turbochargers?

timothymoffat



Thread of the Month wins a Road Angel safety camera & blackspot alert device worth £159.99



The originator of the best **evo** forum thread wins a Road Angel Gem+. The Gem+ automatically updates its camera database as you drive and allows users to share the locations of 'live' camera vans.

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POWER ^V



The all-new AMG GT is laser-targeted at the quicker 911s, here represented by the latest Carrera GTS. The AMG has a thumping biturbo V8; the GTS promises speed with sublime agility. Which wins?

PHOTOGRAPHY by PAUL BARSHON

AMG GT S v 911 GTS

PRECISION



INTRODUCTION

AMG GT S

DAN PROSSER



I'VE NO IDEA WHY QUITE

so many people are rushing to get out of San Francisco at 8am on a Thursday. Shouldn't they be hurrying to get into the city for work at this time of day? Whatever the reason, this crawling traffic jam is threatening to scupper our carefully wrought plan.

The Mercedes-AMG GT's show-car cabin is a pretty cool place in which to while away a delay on Highway 101, but with a squeaky schedule and an awful lot to get done, that feels like scant consolation. The official programme for today's press launch includes a mid-morning coffee stop at a winery in Redwood City, a spot of lunch a little later on and then an afternoon at Laguna Seca. I'm sacking off the whole lot.

Four hundred miles to the south of here, Jethro Bovingdon should be doing his utmost to

sneak away from the 911 Carrera GTS launch without getting lynched by a local PR. We've agreed on a meeting point somewhere between the two, which just happens to be Cholame – the place where James Dean met with his end.

In launching their cars on the same day, and within striking distance of one another, Mercedes and Porsche were practically inviting us to duck the launch programmes and attempt to pull off what should be a compelling twin test. If this traffic jam goes on much longer, though, the whole plan could fall apart.

I've bagged a top-spec AMG GT S with the Dynamic Plus pack, which adds adaptive engine mounts. It has the more powerful version of the new 4-litre, twin-turbo V8; 503bhp and 479lb ft of torque should give it the raw firepower to deal with the 911. With a sophisticated chassis – aluminium construction, double

wishbones, front-mid engine layout, transaxle, electronically controlled diff – and a reasonable 1570kg kerb weight, it might even give the Porsche a run for its money in dynamic terms.

To understand why more or less every European premium car maker is chasing the sports coupe market, it's worth knowing that Porsche sold close to 30,000 911s worldwide last year; Jaguar, Audi, BMW and now Mercedes all fancy a slice of that lucrative pie. The F-type R, R8 and i8 are all, in their own ways, deeply impressive machines; the AMG GT will have to be some kind of talent to merit comparison.

As I pass San Jose, the traffic thins. I've lost an hour or so, but I'm still on course to meet Jethro and our photographer at midday, giving us a few solid hours of shooting before the late autumn sun drops behind the Californian hills. The AMG GT has a tough day ahead of it.



911 GTS

JETHRO BOVINGDON



POOR PORSCHE. IT FLIES

out journalists from all over Europe to the 991 GTS launch in Los Angeles and the only point of discussion on the plane, at dinner and even at breakfast with a line of candy-coloured GT3s lined-up outside the plush Langham Huntingdon Hotel, is the new Mercedes-AMG GT. Some of the US guys have come straight from the AMG launch up the coast near San Francisco and are downloading their thoughts; other UK colleagues have already driven the Porsche and have hotfooted it to the AMG event. They're tweeting furiously about Laguna Seca and the new 4-litre V8 engine and all sorts of other stuff. The Porsche GT3 launch has pretty much been hijacked. I quietly slip away, jump into a rear-wheel-drive GT3 fitted with the seven-

speed manual gearbox. Destination? A quiet road about 200 miles away. Well, it'll be quiet until the thunderous AMG GT S arrives.

It's no surprise that the 991 GT3 hasn't caused quite the buzz of AMG's brand new baby. After all, it's just another 911 derivative to add to many others. Even so, on a cool morning in California the GT3 looks gorgeous: matt black centre-lock wheels, black detailing for the intake on the engine cover and the 44mm-wider Carrera 4 shell combine to create real impact. It just looks right.

The 911 might be a familiar shape but bundled-up within its simple silhouette is the sort of emotional connection that AMG can only dream about for now. Fifty years of motorsport success and iconic road cars has created an intrinsic desire within many people to own a 911.

Of course Porsche has rarely relied completely upon its heritage to win new sales and sloping out of LA the 991 exhibits just how complete a car it has become. It oozes quality – be it the simple but gorgeously finished interior or the way the steering and chassis feel so alert yet so polished. Few cars meld response, control and precision with such deftness.

Does the GT3 feel more special than a Carrera S? A little. The ride is firmer, closer to that of a GT3, the wider shell creates a feeling of even greater stability and the engine has more bite. On a couple of occasions when sitting behind a huge truck at 50mph becomes unbearable any longer and I momentarily wind out the 3.8-litre flat-six, the noise and energy at the top end are nothing short of sensational. Poor Porsche? I don't think so. Poor AMG? We'll answer that question shortly.

A

S THE AMG GT AIMS SOUTH

along the seemingly endless Route 101 from San Francisco and the 991 GTS fires at the horizon on Highway 5 north out of Los Angeles, there are a fair few pangs of regret bubbling up inside. Dan Prosser is in the AMG GT, and while he's driving nearly 200 miles from the launch location, the rest of the journalists are blasting around Laguna Seca and having a high old time. I'm in the Porsche, cursing US speed limits and thinking that maybe hanging around to try every configuration of GTS imaginable (rear- and four-wheel drive, coupe and cabrio – OK, maybe not the cabs) at Willow Springs Raceway might have been a better idea.

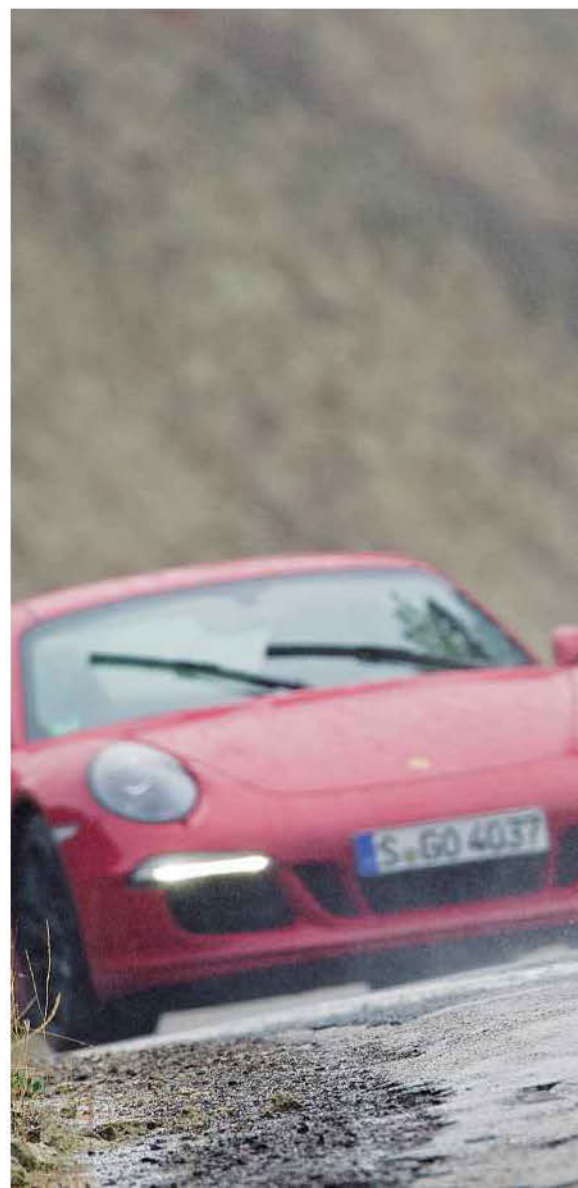
Then we meet halfway along the dizzyingly twisting State Route 41 that rolls and heaves north from the town of Atascadero. A Karmin Red Porsche 991 GTS and Magno Iridium Silver Mercedes-AMG GT, together at last. The regret

by JETHRO BOVINGDON

'THE GT LOOKS MORE SPORTS CAR THAN TOURER, MORE THAN READY FOR A HEAD-TO-HEAD SCRAP WITH THE 911'

Below: in the metal, the GT is much more than a scaled-down SLS; rear aspect in particular is unique and extremely appealing.

Below right: Californian drought temporarily broken



melts away in an instant. This is going to be a very good day indeed. And a bigger test for the Mercedes than even a dozen hard laps at Laguna Seca chasing Bernd Schneider.

Inevitably it's the AMG that dazzles with star quality. In pictures it seemed to me to be just a shrunken, smoothed-over SLS without the cool doors, but there's so much more to it than that: the long wheelbase and short overhangs, the way the front wheels are pushed out beyond the bodywork to create a real sense of aggression, the pebble-smooth rear end with its gorgeous rear lights that are so slim they could be stickers, NASCAR-style. The best thing about it? In scale and stance, it looks more sports car than grand tourer. In other words it's more than ready for a head-to-head scrap with the 911.

In fact this GT S version of the Mercedes, the more powerful of the two models in the launch line-up, might not even notice that the other GTS is trying to kick and punch at its kneecaps.

In terms of power, it's a bit of a mismatch: the GT S's new 4-litre twin-turbocharged V8 produces 503bhp at 6250rpm and 479lb ft from 1750 to 4750rpm; Porsche's GTS has 424bhp at 7500rpm and 324lb ft at 5750rpm. In truth the AMG, at £110,495, falls somewhere between the £91,098 GTS and the £120,958 Turbo. However, experience with the 997-generation GTS suggests the new 991 version will be a sweet-spot and the perfect benchmark against which to judge Mercedes' new player. We'd have liked to have brought along the base AMG GT with 456bhp and a £97,195 asking price but, for the launch, only the GT S was available.

At the heart of the new AMG is an aluminium spaceframe weighing 231kg and closely related to that of the SLS. In fact the whole car borrows heavily from the SLS, including much of the floorpan, the front suspension and the (praise be) hydraulic steering rack. The new M178 dry-sump V8 drives through a carbonfibre propshaft

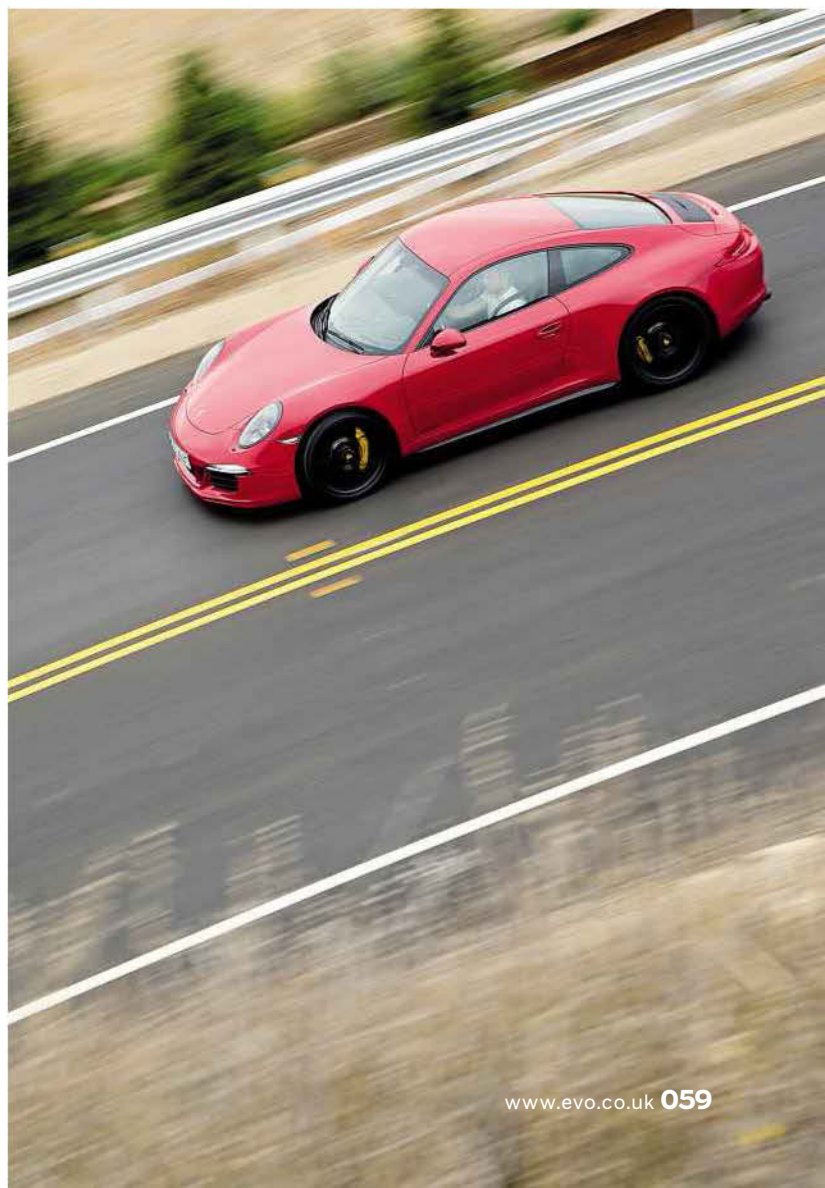
TECH ANALYSIS

AMG GT AERO

To get the full effect of a rear diffuser, the car needs a flat underbody and a low ride height; both of which the AMG GT has.

An underlying law in fluid dynamics is that when the speed of air is increased, the pressure of that air is reduced. This law is exploited by the engineers at AMG. The air passing under the car is trapped between the flat underbody and the ground, due to the low ride height, creating a venturi effect. This increases the velocity of the air, and therefore decreases pressure, creating downforce. The rear diffuser then expands and re-integrates this airflow behind the car without turbulence, thus reducing drag.

Michael Whiteley





**'THE 911 FEELS
SENSATIONAL,
WITH A DEEP-
SEATED POISE.
IT ISN'T ABOUT
TO ROLL OVER
FOR ANYTHING'**

to a seven-speed dual-clutch transaxle, and the engine sits way back in the chassis, snug against the bulkhead. The regular GT comes with a limited-slip differential, whereas this S model gets an electronically controlled version. The weight distribution is 47:53 front to rear.

To get a sense of scale, the GT is 4546mm long and 1939mm wide, so both longer and wider than the 911's 4509mm and 1852mm (despite the GTS adopting the wider Carrera 4 shell even in rear-drive configuration). The Merc is just a little lower, too. Suspension is by double wishbones all-round and the GT S comes with AMG Ride Control three-stage damping. The only area it doesn't seem to have the 911 covered is in terms of weight. The GT S comes in at 1570kg to the Porsche's 1425kg. The extra 155lb ft should take care of that.

For its part, the 991 GTS is more familiar but no less tantalising. The crackling 3.8-litre flat-six is the same as that fitted to the Carrera S

with the optional Powerkit. This option alone on a Carrera S costs £9387, more than the price difference between the two. The GTS adds the wider shell from the Carrera 4, 20-inch matt-black centre-lock wheels and a matching intake grille on the engine cover, unique suspension tuning, a switchable sports exhaust, the Sport Chrono package with dynamic engine mounts and more Alcantara than you can shake a stick at inside. Porsche has also revised the linkage for the seven-speed manual gearbox (to be rolled out concurrently for the entire range).

Even parked beside the box-fresh AMG, there's just something right about the GTS. It looks hunkered down, agile and tough. It might not pack the glamour of the sparkly new Merc, but the GTS has an effortless cool that's deeply appealing. On the short squirt along the 41 to our meeting point, it felt sensational, too, with a deep-seated poise and incredible fluidity. It isn't about to roll over for anything.

Below: every 911 GTS has wider body of Carrera 4, despite many – like this one – being rear-drive only. But AMG GT is wider still





The AMG really licks it for sense of occasion, though. From the moment you open the door and catch a glimpse of the huge central tunnel inlaid with glass buttons and a central carbonfibre section, the big tablet-type screen rising above the four cylindrical air vents and the gorgeous flat-bottomed Alcantara-trimmed steering wheel, a little spike of adrenalin shoots down your back. Our car's Red Pepper leather highlights might not be to everyone's taste and the silver plastic trim looks and feels a bit cheap, but the overall effect is enchanting.

And that's before you slide into the seat and feel how low and wide the GT S sits. Oh, and before you press the engine start button and the 4-litre V8 wakes up with a grungy, gargly sneer. It's a big, enveloping noise, like that of the old 6.2 V8 but somehow angrier, less digitally mastered, and it seems to sprawl out into the atmosphere where the old motor cut through it. It's not as pure, but then dirty can be fun, right?

I know that I should slowly but surely work my way up through the many modes of the GT S, but with so many miles covered this morning and a strict curfew for both cars tonight, there's no time. Instinctively, then, I twist the rotary

dial above the starter button around to S+, select the middle damper setting and slacken the electronic reins with AMG Sport mode. California may be in the grip of a long-lasting drought, but we Brits have brought the rain. Photographer Paul Barshon reckons it's the first he's seen around these parts for a year and I'm expecting a surface with all the adhesive qualities of glass coated in Fairy Liquid. All the better for getting to know the GT S...

The first few miles blow apart the 'baby SLS' tag. For all the shared hardware, this is something new. Aside from the fact that you feel quite a long way from the front wheels, the GT S experience shares little with the SLS. There's more tension in everything that it does. The ride is pretty firm but copes well with the surprisingly lumpy surface of the 41, but it's the body control that's really impressive. The whole platform just feels so stable – wide, low, flat and keen to change direction. The engine, its two turbos sitting proudly in the middle of the vee, is every bit as angry as you'd hope and has precise throttle response. Not quite the surgical precision of the Porsche's naturally aspirated flat-six, but it's good enough that it couldn't

ever spoil your enjoyment. The seven-speed dual-clutch 'box is superb, too, particularly on upshifts, which thump home with a seamless speed and mechanical connection that only the GT3 and Ferrari's 458 Speciale have managed previously. The GT S feels immediately like a 911 rival, a proper sports car.

If there's an initial criticism, it's that the GT S takes a while to ease into. The drivetrain immediately feels superb, so too the damping, but it takes time to learn to finesse steering inputs and tune in completely to its reactions. So the first few miles feel a little jumpy and, because the chassis is so stiff and flat, you don't get the messages through your seat nor through the steering that allow complete confidence. In fact, the GT S has masses of grip and superb traction. Forget any notion of it being an oversteer hooligan at every corner. It might well play that game, but what it really likes to do is dig in and make every one of those 503bhp count. In the damp, the turn-in response is seriously impressive and understeer is zero to very, very mild – even when you really start to lean on the car. It carries huge speed and remains unfazed by the hideous lumps and bumps being pulled

Right: AMG's all-new 4-litre V8 is dry-sumped and placed well back in the engine bay, turbos nestling in the vee. **Left:** interior is simply spectacular. **Below:** S gets vast, 390mm front discs

'WHAT THE GT REALLY LIKES TO DO IS DIG IN AND MAKE EVERY ONE OF THOSE 503BHP COUNT'



TECH ANALYSIS

AMG GT TURBOS

AMG's powertrain engineers took a lead from their F1 counterparts when designing the forced induction system for the GT. The 1.6-litre F1 unit places its turbo in the engine's vee, and this is where we also find the GT's twin turbos.

The chief advantage to this configuration is to reduce turbo lag: the shorter the pipework from the exhaust ports to the turbo turbine, the less lag there is in spooling the compressor.

Additionally, the power unit becomes more compact than it would be if the turbos were placed to the sides.

Reducing the exhaust pipe length has some inherent risks. The risk of detonation (uncontrolled combustion of the fuel/air mixture) increases, as does the risk of exhaust flow reversion, but these have been negated by careful optimisation of cam timings and compression ratios. **MW**

AMG GT S v 911 GTS





towards it at a frightening pace. I like this thing. A lot. You can really hustle it.

Dan's pretty taken with the GT S, too. 'It's really hooked-up, isn't it?' he beams. 'Love the sense of occasion, the grip – and the drivetrain is superb. Shame that amazing noise doesn't get through to the cabin a bit more.' There are no further caveats – but, after the long drive here in the Mercedes, Dan's also just had his first taste of the other GTS: 'It just feels so right. Immediately the steering response, the control of the suspension and the agility create this cohesive whole that's really special.' He didn't even mention the electric power steering. You can tell he's still the new boy.

As the sun finally burns through, the Porsche looks better and better, and I'm keen to see how it feels after the fresh flavours of the AMG. No question, it's more 'ordinary' inside but it feels authentic and beautifully built. Our car's seven-speed manual adds to that sense of purpose. Sadly it also has the optional PDCC active anti-roll bars, and a 20mm-lower sport chassis option. Past experience suggests PDCC delivers more grip and stability but less feel and interaction, and spikier on-limit traits. Maybe the GTS has refined those issues. Let's hope so.

'YOU CAN FEEL THE 911 WORKING LESS HARD TO CONTAIN THE MASS PUSHING AND PULLING IT'

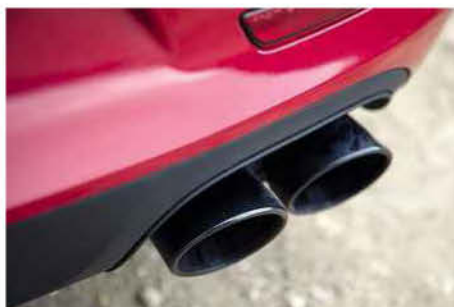
The 911 feels so compact after the Mercedes. The front wheels seem to be a few millimetres beyond the soles of your feet; the bigger glass area gives the car lower shoulders, so you don't feel you're being swallowed up by it. After peering out over the long bonnet of the GTspaceS, the GTS fits perfectly. With the 20mm suspension drop, the ride is every bit as firm as the AMG's, but you can feel it's working less hard to contain the mass pushing and pulling it, leaving greater capacity for unravelling the road. The steering – weightier, a shade slower – is more intuitive and requires

Left: GT mimics big-brother SLS's long-bonneted profile, and as with the SLS you feel a long way back from the front wheels. By contrast the 911 GTS puts you right up there at the pointy end



Left: lashings of extra Alcantara help distinguish the GTS. Latest seven-speed manual gearbox is a beaut. **Below left:** optional carbon-ceramic brakes of test car stunningly good

‘IN TERMS OF PURE RESPONSE, THE PORSCHE’S ENGINE IS MORE GRATIFYING’



not a millisecond of acclimatisation. The whole car seems to meld instantly to your synapses and react to your every whim in a supremely accurate yet almost languid style. Put simply, the Porsche flows.

If the chassis is creamy, the drivetrain is honey-coated. What an engine. The flat-six might lack torque compared with the Merc's V8, but in terms of pure response it's sharper and more gratifying. With the sports exhaust activated it also pops and crackles with the best of them, if that's your thing, and as it climbs through the rev-range towards its high-energy top end, it emits a rich, resonant howl. Some might consider the less showy Porsche somehow 'cheaper' than the Mercedes, but there's a depth of ability and engineering here that's anything but cheap. Even the seven-speed manual 'box – previously a pretty lumpy thing to use – has been honed to add to the overall dynamic polish. It's still not as sweet as the Cayman's six-speaker but it feels closely related to that 'box now, rather than a distant cousin that's gone off the rails.

The GTS puts on quite a show on the 41, and after you've felt it snap precisely between

direction changes, dig its way out of corners with immense traction, and enjoyed the incredible power and feel of its optional ceramic brakes, the sense that it will never run out of composure makes you start to think it has the AMG's number. There are, however, some chinks in the armour...

It's something of a paradox, but the 991 – so instantly intuitive and seemingly shot-through with high-quality feedback – still goes a bit aloof at the limit. The information through the steering seems to quieten just when you want it to ramp up to full volume, and the PDCC does prevent you from dancing the old 911 dance – using the throttle and brakes to subtly manipulate the balance. The result is a car that will eventually slip into understeer but then doesn't open up a whole undiscovered repertoire as it once did at this precise moment.

Of course you can dictate the 991's attitude, but it requires something akin to brutality to do so and the small, beautifully communicated shifts of balance that once defined the 911 experience are replaced instead by a very fast transition into oversteer. PDCC only adds to this trait because there's no roll, no weight transfer

to manage and exploit. And while it's becoming a bit of a truism, the steering just isn't as intimate nor honest as it once was. On the track I have no doubt the GTS would feel superb, and I know it has great beyond-the-limit balance once you're in that zone but, on the road, real thrills are found in the moments before you need to wind on opposite lock, and it's here that the 991 remains tricky to read.

The AMG is the exact opposite. The initial dartiness bred by the light, quick steering and the chassis' flat, broad-shouldered responses is replaced by a faithful, predictable and highly adjustable poise as you edge closer to the car's limits. The steering isn't exactly humming with feel, but it's clean and the weight shifts subtly as you approach the first signs of understeer... With all that torque available you can now really get on the power and feel the car neutralise. It doesn't want to slip easily into smoky oversteer – there's just too much grip and precision for that – but instead it adopts a gorgeous stance with the rear just edging a little wide. Find that perfect clear-sighted corner and you can exit with a tiny bit of corrective lock, the engine roaring up to the limiter and two fat black lines



TECH ANALYSIS

911 GT3 TORQUE VECTORING

Porsche Torque Vectoring (PTV) uses individual rear brake intervention to increase the agility of the 911 GT3. Using an array of sensors, including ones for yaw rate and steering angle, the on-board computer knows when the driver is pitching the car into a slow-to-medium-speed corner. In this situation, the computer can apply brake pressure to the inside rear wheel, which forces a yaw moment about the car, actively pulling it in towards the apex. The system works alongside the mechanical (on manual models) or electronic (on PDK models) locking differential, which comes into its own in higher-speed turns, and when accelerating hard out of corners. Thus the control system needs to know how much intervention is possible before the locking differential tries to intervene. **MW**



'SO, HAS AMG ECLIPSED THE 911 STRAIGHT OUT OF THE BOX? IT'S A TOUGH ONE TO CALL'

scribing the perfect line. It feels superb and there are no surprises.

Throwing the GT S from corner to corner, its composure is almost unshakeable, front and rear in unison; only if you're super-ambitious on turn-in do you feel the rear fall into a little roll-oversteer. You can feel the benefit of the engine's location, right back behind the front axle line, every time you turn the steering wheel.

It's not perfect, of course. For all the brilliance of the gearbox on upshifts, the downshifts still don't feel quite in tune with the left-hand paddle. In the latest Ferraris as you pull the paddle the rev-match seems to be simultaneous with the paddle actuation. I love the hefty, short-action paddleshift on the GT S, but maybe it's so short that it prevents that amazing synchronicity. Short, sharp bumps on the way into corners also suggest a slight lack of suspension travel for the rear axle. It's nothing like as pronounced as in an SLS Black Series, but it can skip clear of the surface where the Porsche just breathes with it.

So, has AMG eclipsed the 911 straight out of the box? It's a tough one to call. The GT S

feels more theatrical and indulgent; it has a superb drivetrain and a chassis that really surprises with its raw grip, control and on-limit progression. The Porsche counters with greater agility, an engine of exceptional response, a unique fluidity and a more focused vibe. There are moments when it delivers an experience of almost sumptuous quality – and let's not forget it's £20,000 cheaper, too. However, the interaction that used to define the 911 just isn't as deep-rooted as it once was and, with PDCC fitted, its limits are sharper-edged than you might hope. On the road, at least.

You can feel a cop-out coming, right? I'm trying to avoid that, but the answer isn't black-and-white. Would a non-PDCC GTS have felt more natural at full flight? Would the four-wheel-drive version – in the past we've preferred the 991 in C4 form – have shown more on-limit progression, just a little more feel? I think so. But there's an old footballing cliché that you can only beat what's in front of you. Today, the GT S wins. It's a fantastic car. Bring on the new Audi R8. The AMG GT S is ready. ✕

Right: this one's gone right down to the wire – both these cars are among the finest sports coupes around £100k can currently buy

MERCEDES-AMG GT S

Engine V8, 3982cc, twin-turbo
CO2 219g/km

Power 503bhp @ 6250rpm

Torque 479lb ft @ 1750-4750rpm

Transmission Seven-speed dual clutch,
rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential

Front suspension Double wishbones, coil
springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear suspension Double wishbones, coil
springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar

Brakes Ventilated discs,
390mm front, 360mm rear

Wheels 9 x 19in front, 11 x 20in rear

Tyres 265/35 ZR19 front, 295/30 ZR20 rear

Weight 1570kg

Power-to-weight 326bhp/ton

0-62mph 3.8sec (claimed)

Top speed 193mph (limited)

Basic price £110,495

On sale Now

evo rating ★★★★★

PORSCHE 911 CARRERA GTS

Engine Flat-six, 3800cc
CO2 223g/km

Power 424bhp @ 7500rpm

Torque 324lb ft @ 5750rpm

Transmission Seven-speed manual, rear-
wheel drive, limited-slip diff, torque vectoring

Front suspension MacPherson struts, coil
springs, PASM dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear suspension Multi-link, coil springs,
PASM dampers, anti-roll bar

Brakes Ventilated discs,
340mm front and rear

Wheels 8.5 x 20in front, 11 x 20in rear

Tyres 245/35 ZR20 front, 295/30 ZR20 rear

Weight 1425kg

Power-to-weight 302bhp/ton

0-62mph 4.4sec (claimed)

Top speed 190mph (claimed)

Basic price £91,098

On sale Now

evo rating ★★★★★





FRIGHT CLUB



by JETHRO BOVINGDON

PHOTOGRAPHY by DEAN SMITH

Do the Mercedes SLS AMG Black Series and Porsche 997 GT2 RS really deserve their fearsome reputations for venomous behaviour? We swallow some brave pills and, in less than ideal conditions, provoke their inner beasts





SUPPOSE THERE ARE SOME people in the world who don't want a car they can legitimately nickname 'The Widow-maker'. The poor, misguided fools. They'll never know nor understand the thrill of approaching a car sprouting wings and riddled with cuts to aid cooling, riding low on tyres with barely-there tread patterns, and with their ribcage rattling to the *thump-thump-thump* of a heart on high alert. In a world where many cars vibrate seats and chirp warnings when we're crossing a white line, bleep if there's a car in our blind spot, park themselves and seem determined to remove any need for the driver to actually concentrate, the scary car is an endangered species.

Maybe that's a good thing. Well, maybe. But replace the word 'scary' with 'focused' or 'uncompromising' or just plain 'thrilling' and you begin to understand why we mourn the passing of cars like the Porsche 997 GT2 RS and the Mercedes SLS AMG Black Series. These are cars that put the driver absolutely at the centre of everything, that discard peripheral stuff that doesn't increase agility, feedback and excitement, that celebrate their purity of purpose rather than attempt to be all things to all people. These two cars represent Porsche Motorsport and AMG at their most potent, too.

When they cut loose and just go for it. I like to think in the early stages of their development, when the theoretical numbers were arrived upon, the performance figures calculated and the sheer insanity of these potential creations was laid bare in black and white, that somebody looked around a room of smirking engineers and said, 'F*ck it. Let's build it.'

Even at 6.30am on a dark, near-freezing morning I'd like to shake those people by the hand. Tucked up in the car park of the Graham Arms Hotel in Longtown on the Scottish border, the hunkered-down GT2 RS and vast, sinister Black Series look sensational and my ribcage is thumping that heavy beat. Last night the locals only had eyes for the Mercedes, but this morning I've got the slim, simple key to the Porsche in my hand and I wouldn't want it any other way. My left foot is lightly bruised and my left shoulder aching from the effort of the clutch and tight, heavy 'box on the way up here last night, but I'm smitten and want to try the RS away from the frustration of the M6. The roads, of course, are damp as we edge slowly north on the A7 towards our chosen route near Newcastleton.

The Black Series' dazzling lights bob and weave behind, but when you're in a GT2 RS on cold tyres and slick tarmac anything not directly concerned with controlling the car just

disappears. The big Merc's glare is dazzling oncoming traffic but to me it's invisible. The Porsche is a physical car to drive, locking you tight in its seats, which feel like they're mounted directly onto the floor. The Alcantara steering wheel is gnarled in places, smooth in others, and as the front wheels judder into understeer into slow corners as they find some heat, you immediately understand why. It pays to hold on pretty tight. The rack is weighty too, and the clutch even more so: in fact, it's obviously seen better days as it requires Countach-esque muscle to operate and the 'box feels even stiffer than it should. Even if you're used to pretty 'hardcore' cars – M3s, normal 911s, Clio Cups, that sort of thing – the GT2 RS feels shockingly raw in these first few miles. And deeply, intensely exciting.

Raw maybe, but there's subtlety, too. The ride is actually way better than that of something like a Subaru STI, Mégane Trophy or even a Cayman GTS on optional sports suspension. At very low speeds it jiggles and thumps from time to time, but from as little as 30mph it smoothes out beautifully and the suppleness gives the GT2 RS real poise when you're loping along on the torque. Oh, there's a lot of torque. This relatively small car (tiny compared with the chasing SLS) is almost comically over-endowed. Its coarse, gravelly 3.6-litre twin-turbocharged engine

**'THESE ARE CARS
THAT PUT THE DRIVER
ABSOLUTELY AT THE
CENTRE OF EVERYTHING'**





produces 611bhp at 6500rpm and 516lb ft from 2250rpm. We weighed the cars for this test and the 911 came in at 1391kg (against a claim of 1370kg). That's 446bhp per ton.

The Black Series goes about its business in a very different way but is similarly blessed with an embarrassment of firepower. Its big atmospheric 6.2-litre V8 delivers in a tight, concentrated burst of energy that keeps it in touch with the Porsche: 622bhp at 7400rpm and 468lb ft at 5500rpm, although it weighs 1644kg, 94kg more than claimed. Still, an as-tested 384bhp per ton isn't too shabby.

At this stage neither car is even scratching the surface of its potential. If there was an Audi TT tailing us I bet its owner would wonder why the two cars ahead weren't, well,

AMG v PORSCHE – THE SPEC WAR

The AMG and Porsche war is not limited to the sports coupes. When you compare specs across the ranges, as we have here, you can see that these manufacturers go bumper-to-bumper in classes as diverse as compact SUVs, two-seat sports cars

MODEL	CLS63 AMG S	V	Porsche Panamera GTS	SLK55 AMG	V	Porsche Boxster GTS
PRICE	£86,500	◀	£93,391	£55,345	▶	£52,879
POWER	577bhp @ 5500rpm	◀	434bhp @ 6700rpm	415bhp @ 6800rpm	◀	325bhp @ 6700rpm
TORQUE	590lb ft @ 1750rpm	◀	383lb ft @ 3500rpm	398lb ft @ 4500rpm	◀	273lb ft @ 4500rpm
WEIGHT	1795kg	◀	1925kg	1615kg	▶	1345kg
0-62MPH	4.1sec	◀	4.4sec	4.6sec	▶	5.0sec
TOP SPEED	155mph	▶	178mph	155mph	▶	174mph
ENGINE	V8, 5461cc, twin-turbo		V8, 4806cc	V8, 5461cc		Flat-six, 3436cc
RESULT	AMG wins			Draw		

VERDICT

So, AMG punches hard on power and torque, but Porsche counters with higher (unlimited) top speeds and often lighter weight too, which means it's a draw. And no, we didn't conspire to create this result!

'THEY DON'T GIVE UP THEIR PERFORMANCE FREELY, SO YOU BUILD UP TO REALLY EXERCISING THEM'



getting a move on. I love that, though. These cars don't give up their performance freely, so you build up to really exercising them, listen intently to what they're telling you at lower speeds, delve fleetingly into their full potential through just one gear when a long straight appears, then throttle back and breathe again.

Andy Wallace, who you may know for his outright Le Mans victory in 1988 or his three wins at the Daytona 24 Hours, has been shadowing the Porsche in the Black Series. When we reach our base for the day he jumps out and downloads initial thoughts. This can take some time because Wallace is a set-up master, but it's always solid-gold stuff. 'Extraordinary engine but it took me a while to get into it. Feels huge but surprisingly light and changes direction superbly. Tyres need some temperature to start working and the suspension needs more travel, particularly at the rear. I'm not sure it's scary but it's certainly woken me up!' Later, part of Wallace's feedback will turn out to be spookily prescient.

I swap keys with the Le Mans winner and slide behind the never-ending bonnet of the SLS. Initially the Merc feels huge and, surprisingly, a *lot* more intimidating than the GT2 RS. The size and the fact these roads suddenly feel more like Lord March's driveway, only with oncoming traffic and potholes, immediately puts you on edge. Next up is the combination of the incredibly stiff ride, sharp throttle, super-pointy front end and a rear axle that just can't deliver the total traction so central to the RS's character. When the 325/30 ZR20 Michelin Cup 2 rear tyres are warm they put up a really impressive fight, but in the cold and damp they struggle with the V8's intensity. So coming from the compact, tactile GT2 RS with the protection of a slightly softer throttle response and a little gentle understeer as long as you're well away from full boost, the SLS Black's immediacy and

and large saloons. However, it's Porsche on the offensive here, moving into territory normally occupied by AMG. We've taken a simplistic approach to scoring the data. The lowest price, weight and 0-62 times score a point each, as do the highest power, torque and top speed figures. We've omitted the engine from the scoring, as bigger (or smaller) is not always better.

	SL63 AMG	V	Porsche 911 Turbo Cabriolet	GLA45 AMG	V	Porsche Macan S	ML63 AMG	V	Porsche Cayenne Turbo
PRICE	£112,510	◀	£129,223	£44,595	▶	£43,648	£86,995	◀	£92,628
POWER	577bhp @ 5500rpm	◀	513bhp @ 6000rpm	355bhp @ 6000rpm	◀	335bhp @ 5500rpm	518bhp @ 5250rpm	◀	513bhp @ 6000rpm
TORQUE	664lb ft @ 2250rpm	◀	487lb ft @ 1950rpm	332lb ft @ 2250rpm	▶	339lb ft @ 1450rpm	516lb ft @ 1750rpm	▶	553lb ft @ 2250rpm
WEIGHT	1770kg	▶	1665kg	1510kg	◀	1865kg	2270kg	▶	2185kg
0-62MPH	4.2sec	▶	3.5sec	4.8sec	◀	5.4sec	4.8sec	▶	4.5sec
TOP SPEED	155mph	▶	195mph	155mph	▶	157mph	155mph	▶	173mph
ENGINE	V8, 5461cc, twin-turbo		Flat-six, 3800cc, twin-turbo	In-line 4-cyl, 1991cc, turbo		V6, 2997cc, twin-turbo	V8, 5461cc, twin-turbo		V8, 4806, twin-turbo
	Draw			Draw			Porsche wins		

In terms of the individual pairings, there's little doubt the Boxster GTS is a superior drivers' car to the SLK55, but with the new 911 Turbo not being as immersive as we hoped, the SL63 is a much closer rival than you'd think; the ML63 has the edge over the Cayenne, and we'll test the GLA45 against the Macan S next month. This is a battle that shows no sign of abating.



ability to exceed grip at the rear so instantly makes for an awkward honeymoon.

That's not to say it doesn't feel unbelievably special. The 6.2-litre V8 is magical – like a different engine from lesser versions fitted to cars such as the C63. And I can't ever remember complaining too much about the more prosaic applications. But this thing is something else. It has an amazing sharpness at any revs and a focused blast-wave of performance that builds and builds and then goes berserk. The top end is insane, almost shockingly so. And while you might think that 622bhp isn't much to shout about in the context of, say, a Ferrari F12, I can assure you that the Black Series feels ballistic.

It takes time but eventually the Black Series starts to feel like it's digging into the road rather than skimming along it. The steering doesn't breathe with the levels of feedback that stream through the Porsche's, but there is confidence-building detail there. Trust what it's telling you and you discover a front end of extreme agility and huge resilience. It just turns. This is the key dynamic trait to appreciate because in an instant the Black Series stops being a point-and-shoot machine and allows you to carry real

'YOU CAN PROVOKE AND ENJOY THE SLS WHERE YOU'D DELIBERATELY DRIVE WELL WITHIN THE 911'S LIMITS'

speed. That means on a corner exit the rear axle isn't being shocked by a sudden torque loading and starts to find real bite... The SLS clicks, front and rear working as one, engine climbing its vast power curve, the twin-clutch 'box expertly hitting home perfect upshifts and – finally – decisive downshifts.

It's taken a while but the Black Series has shown the composure, agility and immense capability that allowed it to run the 991 GT3 and Ferrari F12 so close at eCoty 2013. I'm barely tickling the car's full potential but confidence is up and I reckon by the day's end

I'll have one of those drives that'll live long and vivid in the memory.

In the GT2 RS Wallace has already had the epiphany. 'That,' he says, pointing to the mud-sprayed 911 that's slowly going into soft focus as a heat haze sweats from wheels, tyres and engine, 'must be the best road car ever. The steering, damping and traction are incredible. And the engine... I mean, *that* is performance. What's better? Come on, tell me...' Think I need another few miles before I answer that one.

Over the next 30 miles the GT2 RS is every bit the superstar that Wallace describes, defined by a sense of control and intimacy. You sort of expect the 997 to feel old when you jump back into one, but instead it feels more *right*. Steering feel is sensational, the scale of the car allows even these narrow roads to offer a nice margin of error as you straight-line curves that the SLS has to steer around, the manual 'box – even with a creaking clutch – allows incredibly fast shifts, and traction is staggering. Add in the suppleness described earlier and it's a devastating package. So fast, too. The big swell of boost and then the crazed lunge to the abrupt limiter seems to intensify with every



Above: cage fighter: GT2 RS's pared-back cabin. **Above right:** for all its 611bhp, the GT2 RS's biturbo engine isn't much to look at. **Right:** 6.2-litre AMG V8 sits a long way back in the engine bay



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£9994

Space-age '70s aerodynamic design plus a fantastic drivetrain make this one of the finest GTs ever produced.



1998 Porsche 911 Carrera 2
£13,450

Finding any 911 for less than £15k can be tough, but there are still some nice 996-generation cars to be had.

gear. It's remarkable then that even in cold, slightly unpredictable conditions and with such ferocious performance, the GT2 RS feels incredibly secure, neutral and intuitive.

It also demands a lot of respect; you must be mindful of the way the engine comes on boost and not allow that to happen mid-corner. But if you drive with consideration of that massive mid-range spike, the GT2 RS feels anything but scary. In fact, with heat in the tyres the front end is superb, refusing to be pushed into understeer even when the rear tyres are transmitting the full 516lb ft to the tarmac. That neutral stance allows you to really exploit the power and the grip of the Pilot Sport Cup Plus tyres. Over a sequence of nasty bumps under full throttle you feel the wheels momentarily spin up, but the traction control just snips away at the power and keeps everything pointing straight. Against expectations and reputation the GT2 RS is not a car you drive in a state of panic, but rather one that you can enjoy and exploit. That imaginary Audi TT I mentioned earlier? Gone in a single gearshift, never to be seen again.

The Merc is harder to shake but bit-by-bit the Porsche drives away from the SLS. Jumping back into its gorgeous carbonfibre seat it doesn't take long to discover why. The good stuff is very, very good. The drivetrain still sparkles even after the full-boost assault of the RS, the body control is stunning with no roll or dive at all and the front end is completely trustworthy. The front tyres feel a long way away, but you also sense from the supreme turn-in agility that the engine is tucked way back behind the axle. Strong traction backs that up and on smooth roads you can provoke and enjoy the Black where you'd deliberately drive well within the Porsche's limits. You can't beat front-engine/rear-drive cars for a bit of over-the-edge fun.

What limits the SLS is its sheer girth, a slight inconsistency in the brake pedal and incredibly



aggressive damping with very little suspension travel. This never revealed itself on the Route Napoléon way back at last year's eCoty, but here in the Borders the Black's track focus is palpable and, on occasion, little short of terrifying. In a straight line in fourth or even fifth gear, a little bump that the GT2 RS would barely register is a big deal in the Black. It'll shimmy or maybe just fizz into a moment of wheelspin. Yikes. Hit a similar bump mid-corner and the whole car can leap half a car's width from your chosen line. It only takes one incident like that to deconstruct the confidence you've built in the car and suddenly it once again feels big, edgy and likely to bite when you least expect it.

In the end that's what separates these two. The GT2 RS will bite if you're a complete idiot: it has monumental torque that's delivered in a great wave. Should you turn into a slow corner and feel the front start to push wide, then ignore the warning sign and stay on the throttle, trouble will follow. When the engine

hits boost a few tenths later, you'll be subsumed by the mother of all snap-oversteer moments and there's a good chance it'll end when you hit something immovable. But driven with a little judgement, the car offers incredible fluency and control and it actually feels quite simple to extract a good deal of its performance. The Merc with its front-engined layout and normally aspirated engine should be more intuitive still. And it is on a smooth road or a racetrack, its limits more rounded than the Porsche's.

Out here in the wilds it's a very different story. It's just too stiff to cope with these roads and has the potential to bite even when you're not really trying to extract its ultimate performance. It happens to me on a straight but bumpy piece of our road loop. Photos finished, I jump in the Merc and Wallace follows in the GT2 RS for one last drive. A few seconds later the Black hits one of those short, sharp dips that are everywhere around here. The front axle drives over it straight and true but the rear axle's limited travel sends the rear wheels leaping off the surface, landing and then bouncing up again. The process repeats three or four times and I'm frantically trying to predict what will happen next as it bounces from lock to lock.

Eventually all four wheels are pointing straight and are mercifully in contact with the road again. For the next few miles I pootle along at 30mph, then pull to a stop and climb shakily out of the car. The GT2 RS follows in behind. 'Bloody hell, mate,' beams Wallace. 'That was a big one! I was looking to see what you were going to crash into. How did you hold on to that?' I should just shrug nonchalantly but instead babble something about not having a clue. 'Funny, the Porsche just drove over the bump with barely a twitch,' laughs Wallace.

It feels like a good time to go home. I take the GT2 RS. It's a pussy cat. ☒

£25K EVO TEAM CHOICES

Which used AMG and Porsche would we buy given £25,000 to spend per car?



NICK TROTT

C63 AMG saloon, as you can't quite get the coupe for £25,000. Loved my long-term – that engine! Plus, a Cayman S for around £16k and spend the rest on a supercharger....



JETHRO BOVINGDON

I'd suggest an early 996 Carrera but I hear they're now way out of reach for that money... So a nice 997 Carrera with the Sport chassis. And a CL63. Complete spaceship and gloriously tasteless.



DAN PROSSER

If I'm buying a used AMG I'd want that glorious 6.2 V8, so a C63 it is. I'd be tempted by a clean early 997 Carrera, but I couldn't resist the addictive acceleration of a 996 Turbo.



HENRY CATCHPOLE

Tempted by an SL55 for the noise, but I know I'd buy a C63 wagon if I was given the money. For the Porsche I like the idea of a 996 C4S. Possibly in Speed Yellow if I could find one.



RICHARD MEADEN

I rather like the idea of an SLK55, perhaps with a few tuning tweaks. For the Porsche, I'd try to find the best RHD 968 Club Sport I could with the original-equipment M030 pack if possible.

MERCEDES-BENZ SLS AMG BLACK SERIES

Engine V8, 6208cc
CO2 321g/km
Power 622bhp @ 7400rpm
Torque 468lb ft @ 5500rpm
Transmission Seven-speed dual clutch, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential
Front suspension Double wishbones, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar
Rear suspension Double wishbones, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar
Brakes Carbon-ceramic discs, 402mm front, 360mm rear
Wheels 10 x 19in front, 12 x 20in rear
Tyres 275/35 ZR19 front, 325/30 ZR20 rear
Weight 1550kg (1644kg as tested)
Power-to-weight 408bhp/ton
0-62mph 3.6sec (claimed)
Top speed 196mph (claimed)
Price when new £229,985 (2014)
On sale 2013-14
evo rating ★★★★★

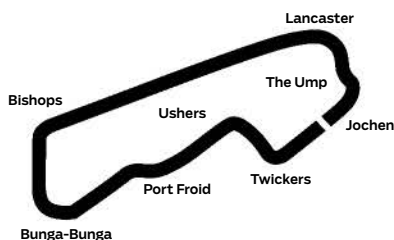
PORSCHE 911 GT2 RS

Engine Flat-six, 3600cc, twin-turbo
CO2 270g/km
Power 611bhp @ 6500rpm
Torque 516lb ft @ 2250-5500rpm
Transmission Six-speed manual gearbox, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip diff
Front suspension MacPherson struts, coil springs, PASM dampers, anti-roll bar
Rear suspension Five-link, coil springs, PASM dampers, anti-roll bar
Brakes Carbon-ceramic discs, 380mm front, 350mm rear
Wheels 9 x 19in front, 12 x 19in rear
Tyres 245/35 ZR20 front, 325/30 ZR19 rear
Weight 1370kg (1391kg as tested)
Power-to-weight 453bhp/ton
0-62mph 3.5sec (claimed)
Top speed 205mph (claimed)
Price when new £164,107 (mid-2011)
On sale 2010-13
evo rating ★★★★★



ON TRACK

THE CIRCUIT



Venue Blyton Park, Bedfordshire, UK
GPS 53.449630, -0.685534
Length 1.5 miles
Direction Clockwise

THE BLACK SERIES and GT2 RS eat up Blyton Park with a combination of raw power and control that's scarcely believable. Both hit 152mph along the straight and show remarkable agility and balance.

The big Merc feels super-stiff in the Track suspension setting but the resulting body control is excellent. Where the standard SLS feels pointy but disjointed – the rear failing to keep up with the front-end response – the Black Series is fluid and reacts as one. In fact, it's an easy car to eke a lap time from as it has very little understeer and when the rear end does slide, it's progressive.

The RS makes you work harder thanks to that manual gearbox and the turbocharged power delivery. Its balance is superb with



very little understeer and controllable oversteer, as long as you don't let it switch from no boost to big boost mid-corner. The engine is ferocious and the brakes are stand-out brilliant.

The lap times are both mightily impressive, the Mercedes recording a 1.02.5 and the RS a rapid 1.01.8.



LAP TIMES

MERCEDES SLS AMG BLACK 1:02.5

PORSCHE 911 GT2 RS 1:01.8

Watch the video at youtube.com/evotv



THE REAL BATTLE?

by ANDREW ENGLISH

Performance and dynamics determined the winner between the new AMG GT and Porsche 911 GTS for our road-test team, but in the marketplace other factors could prevail



THE RECENT LA MOTOR show saw Porsche's new 911 GTS displayed just a short walk from AMG's new GT. The comparisons were delicious, especially as both driving launches were taking place in California at the same time. If the first 1997 Golf-rivalling Mercedes-Benz A-class was then-VW boss Ferdinand Piëch's 'get your tanks off my lawn' moment, then this must be his second, as AMG's GT is launched straight at the heart of Piëch's family business, Porsche.

From a distant planet it might seem as if AMG is stalking Porsche's model plans. The AMG version of the Mercedes GLA crossover was launched as a concept at the LA show in 2013 at the same time as Porsche launched the production version of its mid-sized sporting SUV, the Macan. Similarly, the barnstorming AMG E63 and CLS63 compete head-on with Porsche's own saloon, the Panamera.

While the two companies come from quite different starting points and times, this 911/AMG battle puts one in mind of Sherlock Holmes and Moriarty grappling with each other above the Reichenbach Falls. Porsche, born out of Ferry Porsche's engineering design talent in 1931, with his son Ferry designing the 356 and later the 911, is the stuff of epic history. Porsche might not be a grandee car maker like Mercedes, but it's done more than enough in the showrooms and on racetracks to earn its place in the pantheon of greats. It now has a generous owner in VW and its continued existence is

anchored by its engineering prowess and the iconic sports cars the 911 and Boxster/Cayman.

'The two-door sports cars as we call them,' says Wolfgang Hatz, Porsche's R&D chief. He acknowledges that Porsche has been targeted by both AMG and BMW's M division, 'but they cannot live without their mother companies. They just do derivatives with modified powertrains.'

And what about the AMG GT? Isn't that a gauntlet thrown down? 'AMG is changing now,' says Hatz. 'The GT might be a shortened SLS with a new V8 [it's actually quite a bit more than that], but how sustainable is it? Can you

racing engines, has been hugely successful. Prior to 1999 AMG was a go-to Mercedes racing and tuning business, independent but with excellent relations with the factory; post 2005 it was a wholly owned division. In 2013 it sold 32,000 cars globally with some AMG content (3500 in the UK); in 2014, worldwide sales were closer to 40,000. In the ritzier parts of Newport Beach, virtually every Merc carries AMG's badge and every BMW an M logo. The brilliance of both sub-brands is there are various entry points, from branded floor mats to full fire-breathing cars. There's only one way into the world of Porsche, and that's to buy a whole car.

Mercedes ownership has given AMG the financial clout to realise a long-held ambition. 'To be a serious sports car manufacturer,' says Tobias Moers, AMG chairman, 'you need to make your own car.'

'THIS 911/AMG BATTLE PUTS ONE IN MIND OF SHERLOCK HOLMES AND MORIARTY GRAPPLING WITH EACH OTHER ABOVE THE REICHENBACH FALLS'

live with just one product? Remember they have a very short life cycle.'

Porsche's global sales last year were up 14.9 per cent year-on-year and this year's sales are up 13.8 per cent to the end of October, but Hatz agrees the sports car market is down. 'The two-door sports car market has not recovered [from its collapse in 2008],' he says, 'and for us it's been a major issue, because we love our sports cars but also because it's a business issue.'

Yet AMG, which emerged basically from Mercedes' withdrawal from racing in 1965 leaving two dedicated race-department engineers, Hans-Werner Aufrecht and Erhard Melcher, to set up shop developing Mercedes

The GT is a strategic decision to go into the traditional sports car market, to make a statement in a competitive segment: if we gain customers [from rivals] that would be nice...'

Yet without the Cayenne and Macan, Porsche would struggle, and while the threat of the AMG GT is very real, in the end if you want a 911, the GT isn't really a substitute and vice versa. With cruel irony, the main battles will be waged in the SUV and saloon sectors, where AMG and BMW M both nibble away at Porsche sales in markets which aren't committed to steely-eyed performance engineering – here a set of AMG or M kick-plates are just as real and desirable as a whole Porsche. ☒

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NEW TT v RCZ R v 370Z v BRZ



by DAVID VIVIAN

PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

Title fight

Could the new 227bhp, front-drive Audi TT 2.0 be the coupe to choose if you've got £30k burning a hole in your pocket? We find out by pitting it against its most talented rivals: the Peugeot RCZ R, Subaru BRZ and Nissan 370Z





T

O SOME DEGREE, THE LINE-UP FOR this group test is predicated on a hunch. Henry Catchpole's to be precise. Driving the new Audi TT 2.0 TFSI quattro in the last issue, he speculated that 'the cheaper, manual, front-wheel-drive TT might actually be the one to have if you can't stretch all the way to a TTS'.

We decided that we couldn't this time. Readers with long memories might recall that the last time a TT went toe-to-toe with Peugeot's RCZ R in these pages (*evo* 193) it was the previous-generation, 'Mk2' TTS, and it didn't end particularly well for Vorsprung durch Technik, stymied in part by the burden of its plus-£4k price tag. In Mk3 form, the TTS costs a borderline blink twice £38,790, which prises out the gap to a still-harder-to-justify £7k. In truth, the 306bhp Audi is after Porsche Cayman

customers and would no longer consider the over-achieving Peugeot a valid threat.

Which isn't to say the TT versus RCZ R feud is over. Far from it. With its lighter, faster, smarter and more efficient third-gen TT operating from within a subtly re-aligned range, the German company has levelled the playing field, equipping second-tier models with the spec and sporting chops to compete against the ostensibly fiercer and more focused, performance-prepped über-Pug. As such, the front-drive, manual-only 2.0 TFSI S-line's £32,410 checks in just north of its Gallic rival, wiping out the RCZ R's previous headline price advantage. And although the Peugeot's 266bhp soars comfortably above the TT's 227, the claimed performance stats say there's little to choose between them (both around six seconds to



*‘THE CLAIMED
PERFORMANCE
STATS SAY
THERE’S LITTLE
BETWEEN THE
RCZ R AND TT’*

60, both limited to 155mph).

So, a fascinating needle re-match in prospect there. But there’s no way we’d leave it at that. The performance coupe market still nurtures its roots and, to properly test the front-drive practitioners’ dynamic mettle, we’ve drafted in two exemplars of the rear-drive art in the shape of the small, underpowered but, in some crucial respects, exquisitely talented Subaru BRZ and one of the great big-banger, zero BS, honest-as-the-day-is-long circa-£30k performance packages, the Nissan 370Z (recently treated to a few mild cosmetic alterations but not yet available thus tweaked, so reader Matthew Pennock’s immaculate white Nismo-spoilered example stands in).

My morning starts while it’s still dark and with a yawn so wide I can hear my jaw crack. But it

starts in the TT and, automotively speaking, that’s not a bad way to ease yourself into the day. From the first touch of the cold door handle the Audi feels as if it’s been hewn from some exotically inert material by an industrious army of hovering robotic lasers. Much has been made of Audi’s attention to perceived quality over the years, but the way it moves the game on with each successive generation is extraordinary. The spare, pared back functionality and integrated tech of the interior are things of wonder, too, especially the object lesson in how to do an analogue-aping fully digital hi-res TFT instrument display with smoothly morphing user configurations. Perhaps even more than the overt sci-fi stylings of the BMW i8, it feels like the future.

Predictably, the Audi is easy-going company on



*‘THE BRZ’S
RED LINE ISN’T
A FRIENDLY
WARNING NOT
TO OVER-REV
THE ENGINE BUT
A TARGET’*

the slog round the M25 and up the M1 before the final stretch of B-road relief to **evo** Towers. With the Driver Select menu set to Comfort, the ride really is pretty good and part-throttle refinement appropriately soothing for this time of the morning. In fact, nothing jars. It’s as if everything has been thought through, resolved and polished to a squeaky nth degree, which it almost certainly has. This doesn’t make the new TT any more a great drivers’ car than its predecessor, of course, but as a means to travel (on boring traffic-clogged roads) to the showdown that will throw more light on the matter, it’s the car I’d have wanted to be in.

Actually, it’s slightly more than that. **evo**’s tried and trusted local byway, the B660, is neither boring nor traffic-clogged and, by the time our convoy of coupes arrives to cover the first few miles, I’m intrigued not just by the TT’s evolved ‘Audi-ness’ but also what so far seems, somewhat less characteristically, like a slightly freer, looser-limbed chassis set-up with a keener sense of agility and adjustability. Perhaps the car’s low-stress environment and distractingly cool interior design have simply put me in a good mood. We’ll see.

But first, craving some contrast and a respectable B660 benchmark, I jump in the Subaru and set off with the most urgent chirp of modestly sized

rear-wheel rubber its torque-lite, 197bhp boxer motor can muster. The slowest and cheapest car here by some margin, the BRZ’s specialised skills on twisty roads nonetheless qualify its inclusion. The immediate contrast with the TT, however, is almost stupefyingly stark.

Where the Audi gives you its vision of a pristine, silk-touch future, the Subaru – like its twin, the Toyota GT86 – assumes a longing for the past, fashioning an interior steeped in retro design culled from the era of flares, mullets and puffa rally jackets. The inclusion of cheap, scratchy plastic for the fascia is frighteningly authentic, as is a radio so crummy it looks as if it’s been stuck on the dash with glue. Let’s be clear about this: it isn’t cute and it isn’t cool.

In other respects, though, the BRZ feels absolutely right. You sit very low, the seats are well padded and supportively shaped, while the positioning of all the major controls is very driver-centric (as opposed to the perfunctorily placed minor switchgear). A big, boldly marked rev counter sits at the axis of the instrument display, Porsche style, and is clearly visible through the small, thick-rimmed steering wheel, which, refreshingly, is solely for changing direction and bereft of buttons. In short, get past the build and



Left: BRZ (front) and 370Z are the only rear-drivers in this test, and are separated by some 126bhp and 117lb ft in the Nissan's favour. **Above:** new TT's steering is better than that of many recent Audis. **Right:** BRZ's interior won't win any quality awards. **Below:** RCZ can be provoked into oversteer with a well-timed lift off the gas



style issues, and the Subaru's interior feels more snug and intimate than the TT's. More sports car-like, too.

The BRZ/GT86 is one of those cars you worry you have to re-evaluate every time you get behind the wheel. Mostly it's a case of trying to attribute value to the things it does very well (steer and skid is a bit simplistic, but you get the idea) while weighing up the deficit in performance and, thanks to a rock-hard ride, occupant comfort. All of which makes it an infuriatingly difficult car to come to a definitive conclusion about but undeniably one you can have a heap of fun in trying.

After the Audi, by no means woolly at the front, the Subaru feels so pointy and darty I have to take a deep breath and tell myself to relax. The car seems to require no more than the energy level of a blink at the steering wheel rim to send its nose hunting the nearest apex. But get used to it and there can be no doubting the responsiveness, purity and accuracy of the BRZ's all-electric helm. It may not be brimming with feel but neither is it tainted by torque, an inevitable corollary for the muscular front drivers, and it is meatily weighted, especially in Sport mode.

The 7500rpm red line painted on the large rev counter isn't a friendly warning not to over-rev the engine but a target if the BRZ is to stand any chance of staying in touch with the turbocharged Audi and Peugeot. As for the 323bhp Nissan, simply forget it. It's a bit of a grit-your-teeth exercise, too, as there's no joy in winding out the rather fizzy, thrummy, industrial-sounding boxer motor. Commit to the process, though, and there's a lot to like about the short-throw, mechanically precise gearchange and, indeed, what the chassis can do to preserve your hard won speed. First, it doesn't sacrifice any to understeer turning in. Secondly, although very firm, the suspension is so well controlled by the damping and the chassis so well balanced that achieving and maintaining a neutral attitude requires no special expertise. And thirdly, you can more or less give it the



lot on the exit of a bend in the dry and harness all the drive the engine can deliver or, if you're purposefully a little more brutal with throttle and steering, provoke a few degrees of drift, easily corrected with the super-direct steering. That said, it isn't quite as satisfying as it should be. The Subaru's narrow, eco-spec tyres do make the car exploitable and adjustable, but the trade off is so much sidewall deformation in hard cornering that, if you're really having to lean on it to achieve the desired slide, the car can feel a little imprecise and woolly.

No, the BRZ doesn't do effortless pace or anything like it, but engage with it on its own terms and its real-world performance belies the modest power and torque outputs. If you're not prepared to do that, the Japanese coupe doesn't make an awful lot of sense. Thing is, as numerous tuning firms have shown, a far better car is just a turbo or supercharger away. And as **evo** discovered with its long-term GT86, swapping the rubber for something with more performance cred tidies things up no end.

Still, the Subaru as it is puts down a significant marker for the rear-drive camp, scoring highly for its steering, agility and composure. If its appeal is very specific, it's also writ very large. But, and I won't labour the suspense for those who feel they might know what's coming, its best game is made to seem trivial and inconsequential by the Nissan 370Z.

Muscle-bound, chunky, unsophisticated, growing long in the tooth and, for the past few years, living in the shadow of the mighty GT-R, the 370Z is an easy car to underestimate. But the fact is, even in pre-facelifted form, it still looks great with its squat stance and wildly flared haunches. The style – shown subtly revised at October's Paris motor show with a new front bumper design incorporating a pair of vertical LED running lights and a remodelled air intake – continues to express the car's tough, unfrilly personality to a tee. As does the big, bold sculptural architecture on the inside. And no other sub-£30k coupe packs a naturally aspirated 3.7-litre V6 with 323bhp. In a straight line at least, nothing here gets close.

In the 370Z, the B660 is an altogether different proposition, reeled in at a cranked lick to the hollow, howling accompaniment of that barrel-chested V6, the soundtrack scored by the short, punchy action of the six-speed manual gearbox, which, if slightly less notchy than the Subaru's, feels just as precise and secure when rushed. And it isn't just the performance that scribes a bigger compass. The tenacity and stability of the chassis when pushed to the limit is in a different league. No, the Nissan's front end isn't quite as sharp, clean and agile as the Subaru's, but it is capable of generating more grip and the meaty, feel-full steering is just as satisfying to use when scything through a series of esses.

The Z doesn't have the delicacy and finesse of



the BRZ but it's dealing with altogether larger forces that have less benign intentions. It gives you the tools to cope – honestly and transparently – but it doesn't pull any punches. Big drifts are there for the taking, you just need to know what you're doing and accept that something more than a gentle roll of the wrists is going to be required. As **evo** staff road tester Dan Prosser remarks, 'it's just a simple, honest car'. But as he also notes, you have to work its engine hard to access all it's got. 'The turbocharged TT, in particular, delivers its performance while asking much less of the driver,' says Dan.

He's right, of course. The Audi takes to the same sequence of soaring straights, dives, kinks and curves and adds to the Nissan's rampaging,

‘THE AUDI ADDS TO THE NISSAN’S RAMPAGING, ALL-ACTION PACE WITHOUT BREAKING SWEAT’





all-action pace without breaking sweat. In a way, it seems utterly remarkable. This TT, after all, has nearly 100bhp less than the 370Z and yet it feels very nearly as rapid down the straights, its turbocharged 'four' pulling more strongly and smoothly from lower revs and through the mid-range than the Nissan's V6, if sounding somewhat muted and anodyne by comparison, despite the engineered rorty veneer and the VW Group signature exhaust *thrrap* at full-throttle upshifts.

Its cornering speed is prodigious largely irrespective of the road surface. Yes, there's some torque-steer and wheelspin – enough to let you know the surface beneath the front wheels isn't perfectly smooth and that you're trying – but it's generally well contained and does little to prejudice the steering's crisp, precise and well-weighted responses. Prosser, a keen observer of Audi dynamics, is largely impressed, commenting that the new TT's helm doesn't suffer from the stickiness that's afflicted certain recent Audis and confessing it's the first lower-order TT he's really

enjoyed driving over an engaging piece of road.

The more playful dynamic demeanour I thought I detected on my journey north to **evo** Towers re-emerges on the B660, the more so if you go to the trouble of teaming the softer chassis setting with the sharper throttle and steering maps in the Driver Select menu's Individual setting. The usual Dynamic mode fallback is good for going fast, tying everything down for minimal body movement and maximum grip, but the effect is rather smothering. At least the TT is now capable of bending a little more to the driver's will than imposing its own agenda but, by and large, the over-arching behaviour is still more benign and secure than it is fast and loose.

But somehow that seems fitting for such a beautifully exact, precisely honed package. The silicon-slick action of the gearchange, the superbly damped drivetrain, the even weighting and linearity of the major controls. It all fits together so well and underscores the traits that remain so valuable to the brand.

Top left: TT's interior is sublime. **Above:** TT is more than capable of hassling the 370Z; it may be 96bhp down on the Nissan, but its peak torque is a touch higher and across a wide band, lower in the rev range. **Left:** RCZ's fancy alloys



Left: more effort is required to extract the full performance from the RCZ R than from the Audi, but the Peugeot is also a more rewarding drive. **Right:** new TT may not win this test, but it has undeniable appeal

‘THE RCZ R SLINGSHOTS OUT OF BENDS THAT WOULD LEAVE THE TT STRAPPED FOR TRACTION’

Which, perhaps unfortunately for Audi, only serves to make the Peugeot RCZ R all the more exciting. True, black isn't the best colour to show off its exotic curves, and its well appointed but stylistic mish-mash of an interior will never be a substitute for anyone into the Audi's almost incomparable work of art. But to drive the Peugeot is to feel a sense of connection, vigour and involvement beyond the reach of the other cars.

It's hardly a big surprise. The RCZ's rather toothless poseur past was treated to an abrupt about turn when Peugeot Sport, the outfit responsible for Peugeot's Le Mans racers and the awesome 208 T16 Pikes Peak record holder, got hold of it. No exercise in token bragging, this: 266bhp from the turbocharged 1.6-litre engine it shares with a handful of Mini models plus a raft of racy chassis mods saw to that.

Quite simply, the RCZ R hauls you into the action. It sounds hornier than the Audi – if not quite as hardcore as the Nissan – and, despite having a fairly even on-paper torque spread, ignites a full-on bolt for the red line from 4000 revs. It's also quite short geared. The upshot is you need to change gear more frequently than you do in the TT, but the shift is obligingly quick and crisp and just adds to the sense of involvement.

There's nothing deceptive about the RCZ R.

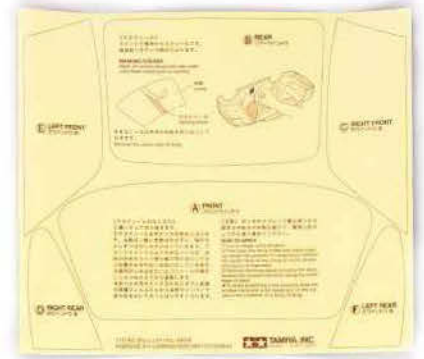
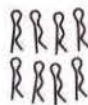
It doesn't share the Audi's knack of delivering crack-on pace as if it's no big deal. You have to concentrate that bit harder, to constantly play throttle response against the available front-end grip. The only shame is that the torque-twitchy but predominantly feel-less steering sells the front end short. In truth, the nose is pretty much nailed, especially when you get the Torsen limited-slip diff to hook up. But, as Dan remarks, exploiting the front end is something of a leap of faith.

If you do, though, the result is decisive. Learn the technique of getting on the power early in a corner to exploit the LSD's uncanny ability to resist understeer and the RCZ R slingshots out of bends that would leave the TT strapped for traction, while a little trail braking on the approach can get the tail moving in a way that opens up options more closely aligned with the rear drivers. In short, the RCZ R may be a wilder, less composed steer than the Audi TT, but it's also a more enjoyable one that will give you a genuine adrenaline rush that eclipses even the brutish, bad-boy charm of the 370Z and the well-resolved but narrow-bandwidth skills of the Subaru.

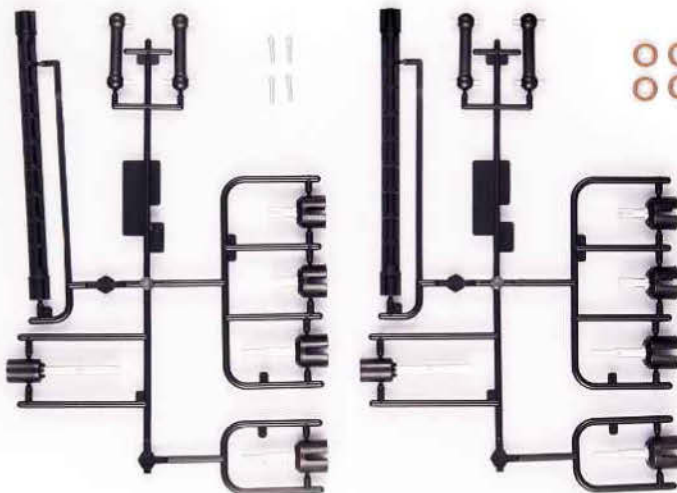
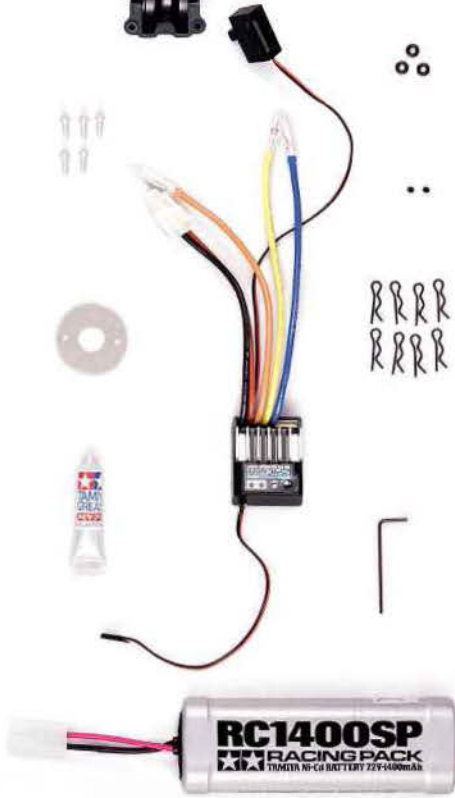
For out and out, owner-proposition desirability, nothing here gets close to the Audi. But if you want a coupe that really does drive as well as it looks, be sure it's wearing an 'R' badge on the bootlid. ☒

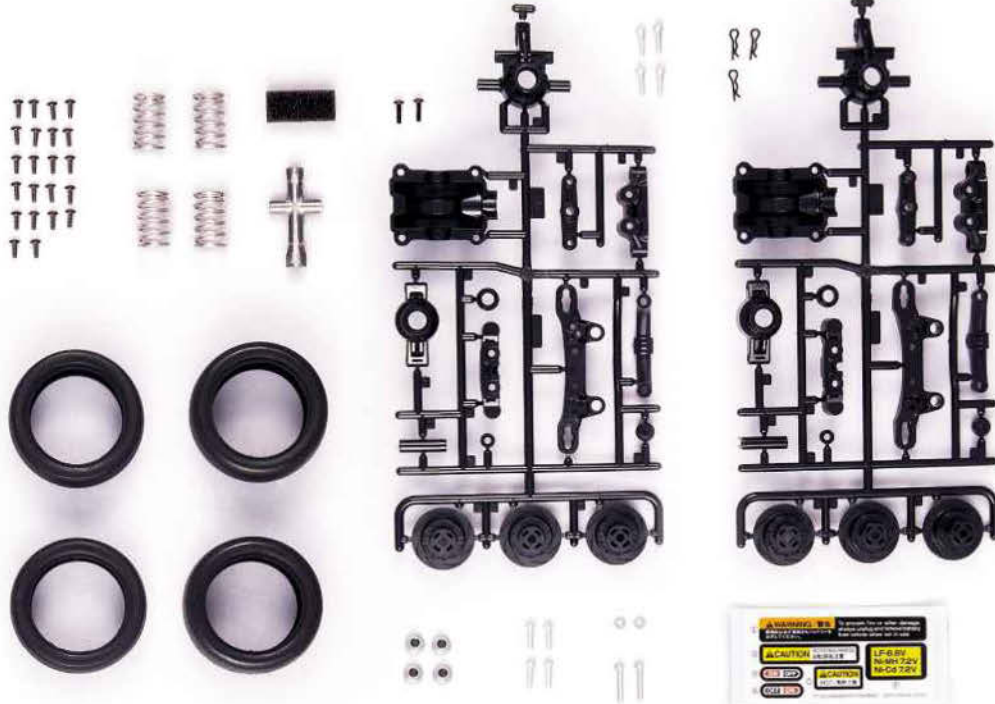
	AUDI TT 2.0 TFSI S-LINE	NISSAN 370Z	PEUGEOT RCZ R	SUBARU BRZ
Engine	In-line 4-cyl, 1984cc, turbocharger	V6, 3696cc	In-line 4-cyl, 1598cc, turbocharger	Flat-four, 1998cc
CO2	137g/km	248g/km	145g/km	181g/km
Power	227bhp @ 4500-6200rpm	323bhp @ 7000rpm	266bhp @ 6000rpm	197bhp @ 7000rpm
Torque	273lb ft @ 1650-4300rpm	268lb ft @ 5200rpm	243lb ft @ 1900-5500rpm	151lb ft @ 6400-6600rpm
Transmission	Six-speed manual, front-wheel drive, torque vectoring	Six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential	Six-speed manual, front-wheel-drive, limited-slip differential	Six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive, limited-slip differential
Front suspension	MacPherson struts, lower wishbones, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar	Double wishbones, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar	MacPherson struts, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar	MacPherson struts, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar
Rear suspension	Multi-link, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar	Multi-link, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar	Torsion beam, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar	Double wishbones, coil springs, dampers, anti-roll bar
Brakes	312mm ventilated front discs, 300mm solid rear discs	Ventilated discs, 355mm front, 350mm rear	380mm ventilated front discs, 330mm solid rear discs	Ventilated discs, 294mm front, 290mm rear
Wheels	8 x 17in front and rear	8 x 18in front, 9 x 18in rear	9 x 19in front and rear	7 x 17in front and rear
Tyres	225/50 R17 front and rear	225/50 R18 front, 245/45 R18 rear	235/40 R19 front and rear	215/45 R17 front and rear
Weight	1230kg	1496kg	1280kg	1230kg
Power-to-weight	188bhp/ton	219bhp/ton	211bhp/ton	163bhp/ton
0-62mph	6.0sec (claimed)	5.3sec (claimed)	5.9sec (claimed)	7.6sec (claimed)
Top speed	155mph (limited)	155mph (limited)	155mph (limited)	140mph (claimed)
Basic price	£32,410	£27,435	£32,000	£22,495
On sale	Now	Now	Now	Now
evo rating	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★





NOT A TOY

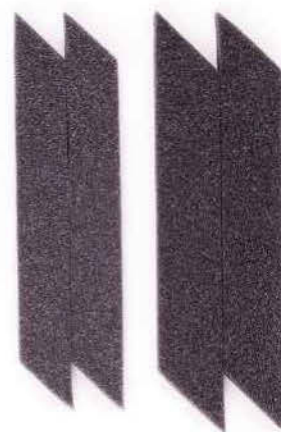
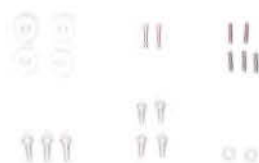
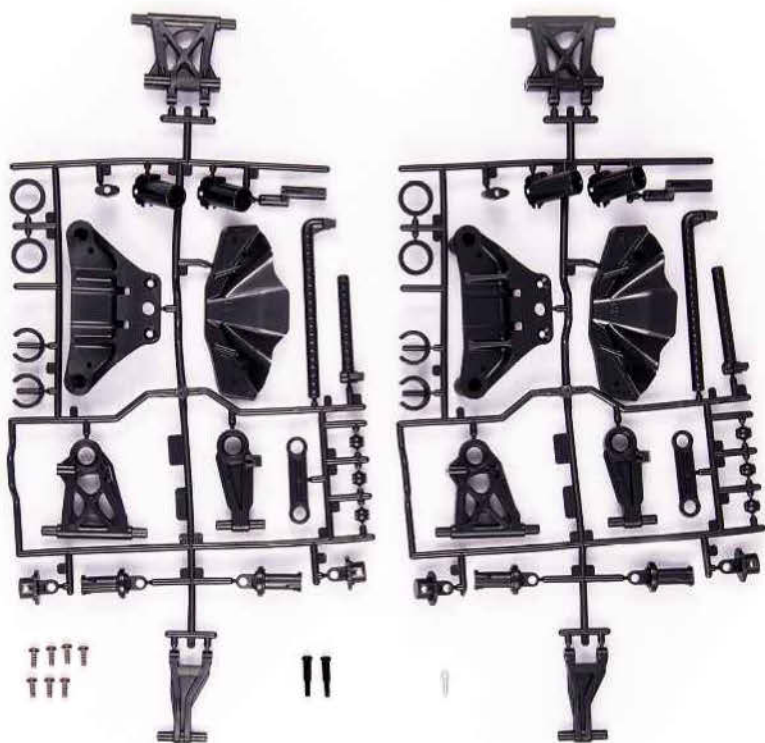




by ANTONY INGRAM

INTRO PIC by ASTON PARROTT

For four decades Tamiya's radio controlled car kits have offered basic lessons in vehicle construction and dynamics, as well as being rip-roaring fun for adults and kids alike. Happy birthday, Tamiya



IF YOU RECEIVE YOUR COPY OF

evo a little late this month, we can only apologise. It's just that since we learned that this year marks the 40th anniversary of Tamiya radio controlled cars, we've been rather distracted. Christmas gift budgets are being strained at the prospect of unforeseen Super Champs and Lunch Boxes under the tree, and lunch breaks are running long to squeeze in one final race around the car park.

Nostalgia is big business right now, but Tamiya's enduring popularity can be attributed to far more than big kids attempting to recapture their youth. 'Tamiya's strength and uniqueness has always been the kit-building experience,' explains Pete Binger, managing director of Tamiya's UK importer, The Hobby Company. 'You buy a kit, you build it, and because you've built it you understand how the vehicle works, how to set it up, how to tune it up and how to repair it if it breaks. It's an educational experience.'

It was Pete's father David who originally introduced Tamiya to the UK. It was a risk. He travelled to Japan in 1966, as a young man, and sat through several meetings full of Japanese businessmen deciding his commercial fate before they awarded him the exclusive distribution contract for the United Kingdom and Europe. The challenge continued on UK soil, where model shops were initially sceptical about the new kits.

'At that time there was no radio control market other than very specialist, high-cost kits,' explains Pete. 'But as the cost came down, I think the dealers started to see the opportunity. The product was of a quality that ensured reliability too, and they quickly realised there was a market for selling tune-up parts. Just like the automotive industry, there's a good margin to be made on spare parts...'

Tamiya itself dates back to 1946, founded by Yoshio Tamiya. Yoshio-san had owned a transportation business before the Second World War, and turned to timber following the war. In 1953 the business evolved from timber to specialised wooden model kits. It was Yoshio's son Shunsaku who encouraged the jump to plastic kits, having discovered those made by American firm Revell in 1958.

Overwhelmed by the detail and quality possible from plastic, he introduced the plastic kits to his father. Tamiya's first plastic kit was a battleship, Musashi, but another company beat it to market at a lower price. Tweaked in the hope of better sales, Musashi became Yamato,



'THE CARS TAUGHT USERS A GREAT DEAL ABOUT VEHICLE PHYSICS'

but despite superior quality it, too, struggled.

The turning point came with Tamiya's plastic model of a German Panther tank. To make it stand out in the market, Shunsaku made it a motorised model – and sealed its success by hiring top Japanese illustrator, Shigeru Komatsuzaki, to draw the box art. It was an inspired move, and Tamiya's box art, with its illustrations, technical drawings and two-star logo, has become as iconic as the vehicles contained within.

Tamiya's first radio control kits appeared in 1975. But those initial kits were a far cry from the hardy models sold today. 'The story goes that there was a guy in the accounts department of Tamiya who was always tinkering with radio controlled cars, playing with them in his lunch break,' recounts Binger. 'Mr Tamiya saw what he had created, and asked him to develop one the company could manufacture and market. He took a regular Porsche 934 plastic kit bodyshell and fitted it to a flat chassis, which became the first model. Of course it looked absolutely beautiful, but the first time you crashed it just disintegrated because it was so fragile...'

Tamiya's RC kits quickly developed. By the time the Rough Rider and VW Baja Bug-like Sand Scorcher arrived in 1979, the kits featured a specialised chassis to which a more robust body was fixed. The cars were more rugged, more useable and less prone to spectacular destruction when erroneously steered into objects. The basic cars taught users a great deal about vehicle physics, too, with realistic suspension, rubber tyres specific to surfaces such as asphalt or dirt, and eventually the choice between front-, rear- and all-wheel-drive powertrains.

When it comes to technology though, Tamiya's racing machines really

TAMIYA'S MOST POPULAR MODELS

OVER THE FOUR DECADES it has been creating radio control cars, Tamiya has produced a multitude of different models. Here we picture some of the best-sellers, several of which have been reissued by popular demand



1. THE GRASSHOPPER

As the name suggests, a proper off-road weapon. Rear-drive and a tough polycarbonate body

2. SUBARU IMPREZA WRC 2008

Not one of Subaru's more successful rally cars, but Tamiya has long replicated the firm's rally vehicles

3. VANESSA'S LUNCH BOX

Tamiya's most iconic model, launched in 1987. Since reintroduction in 2005, an annual best-seller

4. LANCIA DELTA INTEGRALE

A classic design, but the Delta now sits on Tamiya's brand new TT02 all-wheel-drive chassis

5. SUPER CHAMP

Launched back in 1982, the Super Champ is now a limited-run reissue

6. FORD ESCORT WRC

The Escort was in its twilight by the time this model debuted, but it's now highly collectable

7. KAMEI GOLF MK1

A front-wheel-drive model

based on the Group 2 European Touring Car of the 1970s

8. HORNET

Another long-running kit. Rear-wheel drive and a fluid-filled rear damper

9. WILD WILLY WR-02

One of Tamiya's less serious kits, the two-wheel-drive Wild Willy has four-wheel independent coil suspension

10. SAND SCORCHER

The iconic Baja Bug and one of Tamiya's most popular kits since its introduction in 1979

11. SUBARU BRAT

A cult classic, illustrating the variety of Tamiya's current range. Two-wheel drive and 'designed for fun off-road running'

12. MINI COOPER

Another front-wheel-drive kit and one of the longer-running Tamiya favourites

13. HOT SHOT

Re-released in 2007, the Hot Shot is a four-wheel-drive interpretation of Tamiya's popular off-road buggy range

are like miniaturised versions of Grand Prix or World Endurance vehicles. It's not unusual to find carbonfibre and titanium among their constituent parts, with prices to match. RC racing has long been a global sport, with teams crossing the globe to compete. Tamiya's official team, Tamiya Racing Factory, has won five years in a row.

Former RC racer Jamie Booth never quite managed to take a title with Tamiya, but his experience with the factory team certainly helped its development in its early years. Racing since he received a Sand Scorchers in 1980, Jamie travelled the UK and eventually Europe, taking several championships along the way.

'During the end of 1989 I was made an offer by the Tamiya factory in Japan to become a professional RC racer for them. Over the next two years I raced in Japan, the USA, and most European countries, while keeping up with my commitments in the British series.'

As a Tamiya factory racer, Jamie finished as high as second in the 2WD European championships. While he eventually switched to another team and continued racing until 1998, radio control cars, and Tamiya in particular, have more or less dictated his life since. Today, he runs a small distribution company that imports and sells RC cars.

That ability to get under your skin is what has kept Tamiya a household name despite its products remaining true to its four-decade-old concept. Building the kits, as Binger notes, adds an extra dimension you simply don't get with a pre-built car. 'A lot of other manufacturers have moved towards what we call "ready to run",' explains Binger, 'but they don't encourage that hobbyist understanding. They tend to be playthings – you play with it and then put it away, and you don't develop this intrinsic interest and passion.'

Tamiya hasn't always hit the mark. Back in the 1990s the company sold a range of 'glow engine' kits. Based on Japanese GT cars and Le Mans vehicles, the tiny internal combustion engines made the cars hugely fast. Unfortunately, they also encouraged a little too much of that 'hobbyist understanding'. 'They sold extremely well,' explains Pete, 'but they became a big problem for us, as the customer couldn't help tinkering. The engines used to run under immense strain with a few tune-ups and they'd quickly expire...'

Tuning has always been a part of the Tamiya kit experience though, and thankfully most of it enhances the experience. New suspension parts, different motors and upgraded gearboxes further refined the way kits drove and Tamiya continued refining the components itself. It's reached a head with the latest Super Champ, a limited reissue of the 1980s original. The off-road buggy features mono-shock rear

EVO READERS' TAMIYA MODELS

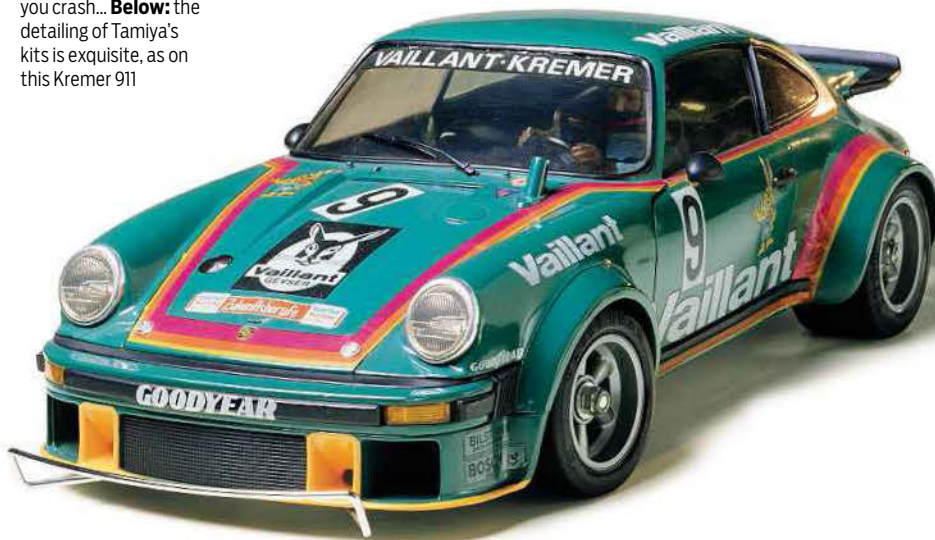
IT SEEMS THAT IT'S NOT JUST EVO STAFFERS who have a passion for Tamiya's kits – when we put out a call for readers' radio controlled rides we were inundated with replies and some very good pictures...





'BUILDING THE KITS ADDS AN EXTRA DIMENSION THAT YOU SIMPLY DON'T GET WITH A PRE-BUILT CAR'

Above: Tamiya's off-road buggies allow you to unleash your inner rally driver, without the big repair bill when you crash... **Below:** the detailing of Tamiya's kits is exquisite, as on this Kremer 911



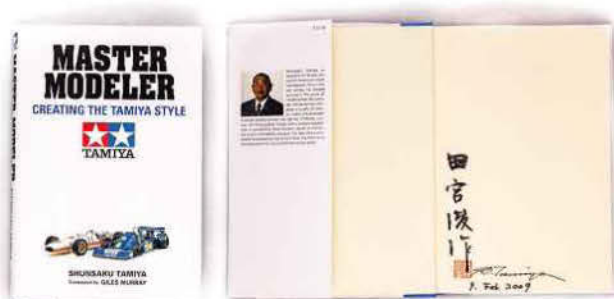
suspension with a separate oil reservoir and a metal gearbox. The firm's newest chassis, the TT02, is formed from the latest plastics. Like modern automotive platforms, it's essentially modular – the TT02B allows off-road buggies to share the same chassis as an on-road Porsche 911 or Ferrari kit.

People still love the old kits, too. The Lunch Box van, perhaps Tamiya's most iconic model, originally launched in 1987. It was eventually discontinued, but since its reintroduction in 2005 it has been the company's biggest-selling model every year.

Despite competition from an increasingly vast video game market and the constant distraction of touchscreen iThings and omnipresent internet access, the appeal of the Japanese firm's kit-based radio controlled cars hasn't waned. By sticking to one formula and only changing where improvements are truly required, it's not hard to see Tamiya creating the same buzz in another 40 years.

Tamiya, *tanjoubi omedetou!* ✕

MEETING MR TAMIYA



I MET SHUNSAKU Tamiya at the Nuremberg Toy Fair in 2009. I made the trip specifically to interview him – a publicity-shy 75-year-old billionaire who rarely gave interviews and barely spoke English. Add this to the fact that Shunsaku, along with my father, fired my passion for cars and you had a very nervous journalist. I remember breaking out in a sweat during the interview as the reality struck that I was interviewing an

absolute hero of mine – the man whose name adorns the boxes of my treasured Silver Sabre, Celica GT-4, Avante and Baja Buggy.

Shunsaku was warm, humble, inquisitive and worked carefully with his interpreter to answer my questions. Sharp too, despite his years. I hear he's still going strong today. At the end, he signed my copy of his fascinating book (see left) – something I treasure.

Nick Trott



by SAM SHEEHAN

PHOTOGRAPHY by ASTON PARROTT

What do all — of these people have in common?

They all now understand the full meaning of our strapline, The Thrill of Driving, having bought their first evo car. And their choices are an intriguingly diverse mix



RED SKY IN THE MORNING, shepherd's warning. It's fast approaching 9am and the morning's pinkish-red sunrise is just beginning to warm to a golden glow. The circuit's smooth asphalt gleams beside me, and the rush of a high-flying jet is only just audible above. It's a calm start here at the Bedford Autodrome, but I can almost sense the excitement in the crisp November air.

Four cars have arrived ahead of me; I'm parked on the circuit's entrance road ready to welcome the remaining three. We've got the whole track to ourselves today, but that's not the reason why we're here. Of course we'll be sampling the technical infield of Bedford's West Circuit later, but the real reason for this gathering is to celebrate these machines.

As different as they all may be – the most powerful has 229bhp more than the least, and costs about ten times as much – these seven cars all have one thing in common. In their own individual ways, they each offer a first glimpse into the world of performance motoring. In other words, they're first **evo** cars.

WE'RE ALL PACKED INTO THE PITLANE building, away from the chilly breeze and watching snapper Aston Parrott stare through designer Will Beaumont's frame-shaped hand symbols. The two **evo** staffers are outside battling the late-autumn climate to grab the perfect opening shot; we're inside sipping coffee and hot chocolate.

Looking through the window at the seven carefully laid out cars, it's clear we've got a great mix with us today. But one in particular immediately grabs my attention: it's Luca Diella's EP3 Honda Civic Type-R

While it's wearing standard bodywork and wheels, it's impossible to ignore the aggressive front camber and bright green roll-cage in the back. It's definitely the least standard car here.

I sit down next to Luca and his friend Josh to talk about the car. 'I used to have a nice car and money,' he says. 'Now I have a barely useable car and no money.' They both laugh. As far as first **evo** cars go, we've started with a pretty extreme example.

'When I bought the car it was totally standard. It was really nice when I bought it, to be honest. Now it's pretty stripped.' I ask why, since the EP3 Type-R isn't exactly renowned for being a heavy slouch.

'I'd done a trackday and loved how the car performed,' says Luca. 'It was my first taste of track driving and I was immediately hooked. In

fact, I loved it all so much that I decided to focus on turning the car into a proper track weapon. Being young I thought I could live with the slightly less practical road experience in order to gain track performance. So that's when the interior started to come out.'

I looked over the interior of the Civic earlier, and it really is stripped. From the dash back there's little in the way of plastics and nothing in the way of carpet. It's a serious job, with sound-deadening and anything not necessary removed. Bucket seats and harnesses have been fitted, and the exposed cabin metal is painted white – a rattle-can job, I'm told – with that roll-cage painted green to clearly stand out.

Surely this is a step too far for a road and trackday car? Well, that's the thing – it's more than just that. 'We're taking it racing next year in the MSV Trackday Trophy championship,' an excited Luca says. 'My first performance car is now turning into my first racing car. It's pretty cool!' The genuine passion and excitement displayed by Luca and Josh convince me that this car is more than just a tool to go racing with; it's an avenue for them to indulge in their passion.

Passion is something I think we can safely assume is shared across this pitlane. And as I swap tables, I switch from one hot hatch owner to another. Andy Nichols' Renaultsport Clio 172 is equally mean-looking, but holds on to a few more creature comforts than the Civic.

The young Geordie tells me why he hasn't gone all-out with the track mods: 'I looked a bit like a chav crawling out of my lowered Clio with bucket seats outside Tesco,' he smiles. 'I put the standard ones back in because it was becoming embarrassing.'

His blue 172 sits on 15in Speedline wheels and looks to be in great condition. But Andy assures me it's far from being a show car. 'There's a place near us called the Hartside Pass. The first time I took the Clio up there, along its twists and turns, I knew I'd made the right choice. The car was just brilliant.'

I ask why Andy opted for the 172. It turns out a Clio wasn't always on the cards. 'I'd looked at cars like the BMW 3-series,' he says. 'They're nice but I thought, I'm just going to get bored. The reason for buying a Clio was therefore purely based around fun.'

Now, whilst I'm aware *Geordie Shore* isn't a documentary of Newcastle life, it at least illustrates that there is more than one way to entertain oneself in The Toon. So why has Andy chosen to spend his hard-earned cash on a car?

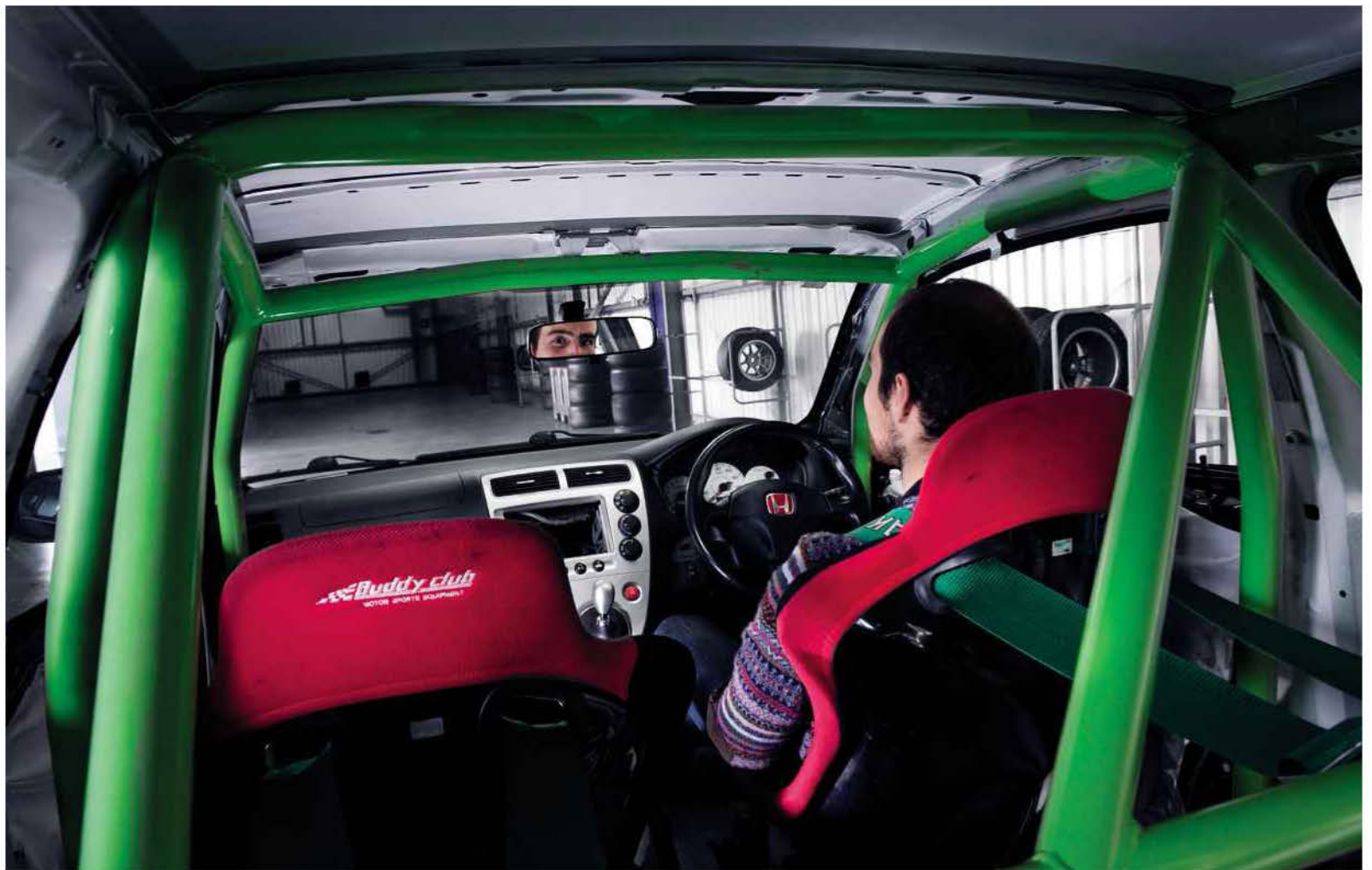
'Cars are a bit of an addiction to me,' he explains. 'I remember when I was a young 'un

→ Luca Diella

Age	22
Location	Brighton
Car	Honda Civic Type-R (EP3)
Year	2004
Why	I bought the Type-R because the 2-litre unit is so rev-happy, and because I love the seating position with the raised gearlever.
Dream evo car	I dream of owning a Porsche 911 4.0 RS because of that naturally aspirated flat-six, slick manual 'box and the car's real sense of purpose.

→ Andy Nichols

Age	21
Location	Newcastle
Car	Renaultsport Clio 172
Year	2003
Why	They're so cheap now and offer so much fun for the money. I'm hanging on to mine as it's a bit of a freak – it's probably the fastest standard 172 engine out there!
Dream evo car	A Caterham R500 – the ultimate trackday toy. Plenty of power without the weight or electronic interference that is commonplace in fast cars these days.





← Daryl Shearman

Age **31**
 Location **Milton Keynes**
 Car **Nissan 350Z**
 Year **2004**
 Why **I wanted something a bit different; I like to stand out. And that engine!**
 Dream evo car **A blue Pagani Zonda F Coupe. It's created by a man who shares my OCD for attention to detail, and it's part of a dying breed: normally aspirated supercars.**

↓ Tom McKellar

Age **22**
 Location **Basingstoke**
 Car **Renaultsport Clio 200**
 Year **2013**
 Why **It's my dream real-world car. I loved watching the Clio Cup racing at Thruxton as a kid. I've wanted one since then.**
 Dream evo car **A Porsche 911 GT3 RS. Simply because it's a race car for the road.**

→ Rhys Wainwright

Age **23**
 Location **Northop, Wales**
 Car **Mazda MX-5**
 Year **2001**
 Why **This is my first step towards my dream evo car. Manual, light, rear-wheel drive: it's got all the best ingredients.**
 Dream evo car **A Caterham R500 Superlight with a sequential 'box. It's light, revs to the moon and has to be one of the most involving and raw driving experiences available.**





OLD CAR BOOST: NEW TYRES

Tyre technology has come on in leaps and bounds in recent years, so if an older performance car is wearing ageing rubber, or its previous owner saved a few pounds by fitting new tyres from the cheaper end of the spectrum, its driving dynamics could be transformed through an investment in new boots.

Modern advances in the chemical composition of the tread compound – the ‘rubber’ – mean that stiffness and outright grip can be improved without detriment to wear and rolling resistance. Both rolling resistance and heat build-up can be reduced by using innovative new materials such as highly dispersible, high-surface-area silica.

Additionally, the reinforcing belts inside the carcass of an older tyre – and many new tyres from budget brands – are typically steel items. The latest performance tyres tend to use either rayon or aramid fibres, which are lighter and perform better in high-heat scenarios. Perfect for ensuring more consistent performance during enthusiastic road driving or on a trackday, in other words.

Michael Whiteley

my mum used to try and get me to read books, but I was always reading car mags. Even now there's nothing I love more than working on the car or taking it out for a drive.'

After borrowing a few ideas for my own Clio from Andy, I swap tables again and head over to speak to Red Bull Racing employee Daryl Shearman. He's the owner of the lovely Nissan 350Z parked closest to the window, and immediately the same 'addiction' to cars is evident with him.

'What does my wife think? She's tolerant of it,' Daryl smirks. 'She knows cars and motorsport are a big part of my life, she understands it's a passion of mine. I'm the same with her ultimately, so we're both happy and enjoy our own things together.'

Daryl's had his 350Z since August 2010, having owned a Vauxhall Astra before it. 'The Astra was gutless, so when I could I decided to look for something beefier and rear-wheel drive. Looking through the options I had, the 350Z stood out as the best.'

The car's stance looks spot-on to my eyes, the coilover suspension supporting it at just the right height over the ever-so-slightly stretched Michelin rubber. With its anthracite wheels, gold calipers and blue body, it all looks quite lovely.

However, as with Andy and his 172, Daryl bought the 350Z to be driven. 'I have friends with cool cars, including one with a 997 Carrera 4S and another 350Z owner who also had an E92 BMW M3,' he says. 'We've enjoyed some epic drives together, including the pilgrimage to Le Mans.'

How does he find the brawny Nissan? 'It's just an experience to drive it, with a combination of that lovely sounding six-cylinder engine and hydraulic steering that gives a good amount of feel. It's everything that I want it to be, really.'

It's not been a perfect ride for Daryl and his 350Z, however. Apparently it tried to kill him once... 'I'd left the car in gear and turned the key with one leg hanging out. It lurched forward along a wall and in the mess my leg got crushed just below my knee. I've ended up with a pretty big scar and a lasting memory.'

Sounds painful, but as is evident from today, both Daryl and his 350Z have returned to full health.

After hearing about Daryl's homicidal Z, it's a relief to note that the driver I sit beside next owns probably the least threatening looking car here. 'I've lived through all the hairdresser jokes,' Rhys Wainwright tells me. 'I had it with my old Ford Puma too, but it doesn't bother me.'

Yes, Rhys's first **evo** car is a Mazda MX-5, a Mk2 to be precise. Often referred to as the softest-looking generation of MX-5, this particular example is certainly not driven softly. 'I think it's been sideways more in the past couple of months than it had in the whole of its earlier life,' Rhys's friend Will laughs. 'The previous owner was an older gentleman, so we reckon it'd lived an easy existence.'

An easy life is not what Rhys has planned for the little roadster. For starters, he's a bit of an adrenalin junkie. 'I'd say I'm a speed addict,' he says. 'Cars, pushbikes, skiing... anything that goes really fast, I love it. Buying a rear-wheel-drive sports car made sense – it's an affordable way for me to get my fix.'

That fix is reachable on Rhys's doorstep, too. He lives 20 minutes away from the **evo** Triangle and has the rest of north Wales's stunning driving roads within easy reach. Anglesey Circuit isn't too far from him either, and that's a place where the car recently impressed. 'We passed far more powerful cars,' he says, 'and when they were overheating tyres and brakes, the MX-5 just kept on going.'

So what does Rhys love most about the Mazda? His response is rapid: 'For me, the best thing about this car is that you can absolutely drive the nuts off it, but it doesn't burn loads of fuel and doesn't chew through tyres. It's cheap and cheerful.'

Cheap and cheerful, now that's a phrase that will appeal to many first-time **evo** car owners, including Tom McKellar. He's in another Clio, which, including mine, makes the total here today three. Well, this is **evo**, after all. Just be thankful nobody brought a 911...

As a Renaultsport Clio 200, Tom's is the newest Clio and it certainly looks the part. Barring a lack of Recaro seats, it's a full bells-and-whistles model with all option boxes ticked, including the one for that **evo** favourite, the Cup chassis.

'As much as I love it, my friends and wider family aren't such big fans,' says Tom. 'They're quite into their Audis and BMWs; it's all about image for them. I think they just don't understand what the car can do and



Ben Jackson

Age	29
Location	Plymouth
Car	Audi S4 Avant
Year	2014
Why	I bought the S4 because it's got a big boot, lots of power and I think it looks just awesome.
Dream evo car	Can I choose two? First would have to be a Mk1 Jaguar E-type Roadster in red. Pure class. If Enzo thought it was the most beautiful car ever made then it's good enough for me. Second, a Ferrari 458 Speciale. You know you would giggle like a child all day long driving it.

Matt Butters

Age	35
Location	Stoke-on-Trent
Car	Fiat Panda 100HP
Year	2008
Why	Dickie Meaden's road test in evo 101. I've always had a soft spot for Italian cars, too.
Dream evo car	The Lancia Delta Evo 2. It's been a boyhood dream of mine to own one. Maybe one day...

how it can make you feel behind the wheel.'

That's what this is all about, isn't it? The feeling you get from behind the wheel. Tom unfortunately doesn't get to experience it too often, but it only makes him more appreciative when he does.

'Living in London my daily ride is the Tube, unfortunately,' he explains. 'But it means when I do get to drive the Clio I love every minute of it. It's a weekend toy, so it's only used for fun when I drive it.'

'One standout memory for me was on a Sunday evening, the sun was setting and roads were empty. Dropping it down a couple of gears, letting the engine sing through to 7000rpm and navigating through the twists of country roads... It sounds silly to people who don't understand, but it's something I can't forget. The car just encompasses my love of driving.'

Such are the talents of Tom's Clio, it seems it has found at least one fan in his family – his mum. 'My mum does use it through the week, and to be honest, she rags it,' Tom laughs. 'Her journey to work has a 60mph stretch of road with a long left. That's the part of her commute where she clicks through second, third and fourth before slamming on the brakes as the road turns into a 30. She always comes home with a driving-related story to tell.'

So, the Clio satisfies two generations of the McKellar family throughout the week. But it gets better. Because despite being based on a humble French runabout, it's still very much Tom's dream machine. 'It's always been the car I wanted,' he explains, 'so to say I've worked hard and been able to afford it, that's something I'm really proud of.'

Which leads us nicely on to our next attendee. Ben Jackson has only recently bought his brand new Audi S4 Avant, but it's not taken long for him to realise this is the perfect performance car for him. He's been used to vans for the past few years, so driving a 328bhp estate has opened his eyes to a new form of driving.

'I've only just been able to really open it up,' he says. 'Before then I had to keep the revs below 3000rpm as part of the running-in. Now I've been pushing it to 5000rpm and it sounds fantastic. The exhaust note, the sequential 'box downshifts... It sounds epic. I can't go back to a van after this!'

As seems to be the case for most of our guests at the Autodrome today, Ben's S4 represents far more than just a material purchase. He tells me how he'd promised himself he'd own a performance car before he turned 30, and with that birthday fast approaching, the pace, capability and daily useability of the S4 meant it was an easy choice.

Ben explains: 'I wanted something that could do everything: something that I can chuck one of my surfboards in and head to the beach, something that's comfortable and practical on drives to work, and then something that, at the push of a button, can be fast and fun through my local Cornish country roads. The S4 ticked all those boxes.'

So why did Ben feel the need to own a performance car at all? He tells me: 'I guess the desire stems from

my childhood. I've always been into cars, and my dad used to take me to watch Formula 3000, Formula Ford races and rallying as a kid. He'd been into his cars from his younger years too, and it really made an impression on me.'

If we were to take anything from today, it's that parents are frequently responsible for the decision to buy an evo car. It's often a big financial commitment to purchase a giant lump of metal that drinks petrol and oil and requires regular maintenance, but being brought up in a family passionate about cars seems to help justify the hit to the wallet.

As I switch tables and begin talking to our final owner, it becomes clear that other, surprising factors can inspire a purchase. 'I bought the Fiat Panda 100HP as a replacement for smokes,' is certainly not the response I'd expected from Matt Butters. 'The funny thing is, I'm actually financially better off since I swapped the cigarettes for the Panda.'

At first I'm not entirely sure if Matt is serious, but he assures me that he is; the car really did replace tobacco: 'After five weeks without a cigarette I thought, I've got this beat. I'm saving £120 a week on tobacco; let's go and buy that car I've always wanted. So I did.'

I find myself laughing. If there is anyone here today who represents a YOLO (you only live once) attitude, Matt Butters is it. It's a decision he hasn't regretted one bit, not least because despite possessing just 99bhp, the Panda is real a hoot to drive.

Our own Dickie Meaden convinced Matt of this before he'd even sat in one: 'Back in 2007 I read Dickie's road test [evo 101] and loved his verdict on the Panda. I read it over and over again, and thought, yeah, I'm having one of those.'

He continues: 'My own trip to the evo Triangle confirmed Dickie's words: no matter where you are on those roads – mid-corner, uphill or approaching a bend – you'll look down at the speedo and see it nudging 80mph. The car was so balanced and so easy to control on the limit. It's just fantastic.'

AND WITH THAT, WE'VE SPOKEN TO ALL of our first-timers. And a wider spread of experiences we couldn't have hoped to have found: we started the morning talking about an extreme, stripped-out, almost-ready-to-race Civic Type-R, and we ended it talking about a tobacco-replacement sporty city car. You couldn't make it up.

The great thing is that somehow, both of these cars – and the five in between – provide their owners with the same joy. First evo cars, it seems, can come in all shapes and sizes, but each one successfully exposes its owner to (without wishing to sound too clichéd) The Thrill of Driving for the first time.

And as evidenced by the queue of cars that quickly forms at the end of the pitlane once the photography and interviewing are wrapped up, and the squealing tyres and hot brakes that swiftly follow, there's no better place to live out the evo strapline than at an empty Bedford Autodrome... ❧

CONTI IN CROATIA

*A serpentine line spotted
on a road atlas inspires
a 1000-mile journey
by Bentley Continental
GT V8 through the
unfamiliar and
captivating beauty of
Croatia*

by HENRY CATCHPOLE

PHOTOGRAPHY *by* ASTON PARROTT





H

HIGH ABOVE ZAGREB ON A LATE

October afternoon there is no one around on Mount Medvednica. A light breeze runs through the surrounding beech trees divesting the branches of a few more unwanted leaves, which then drift down like autumnal snow and settle on the thick, copper-coloured carpet at the base of the

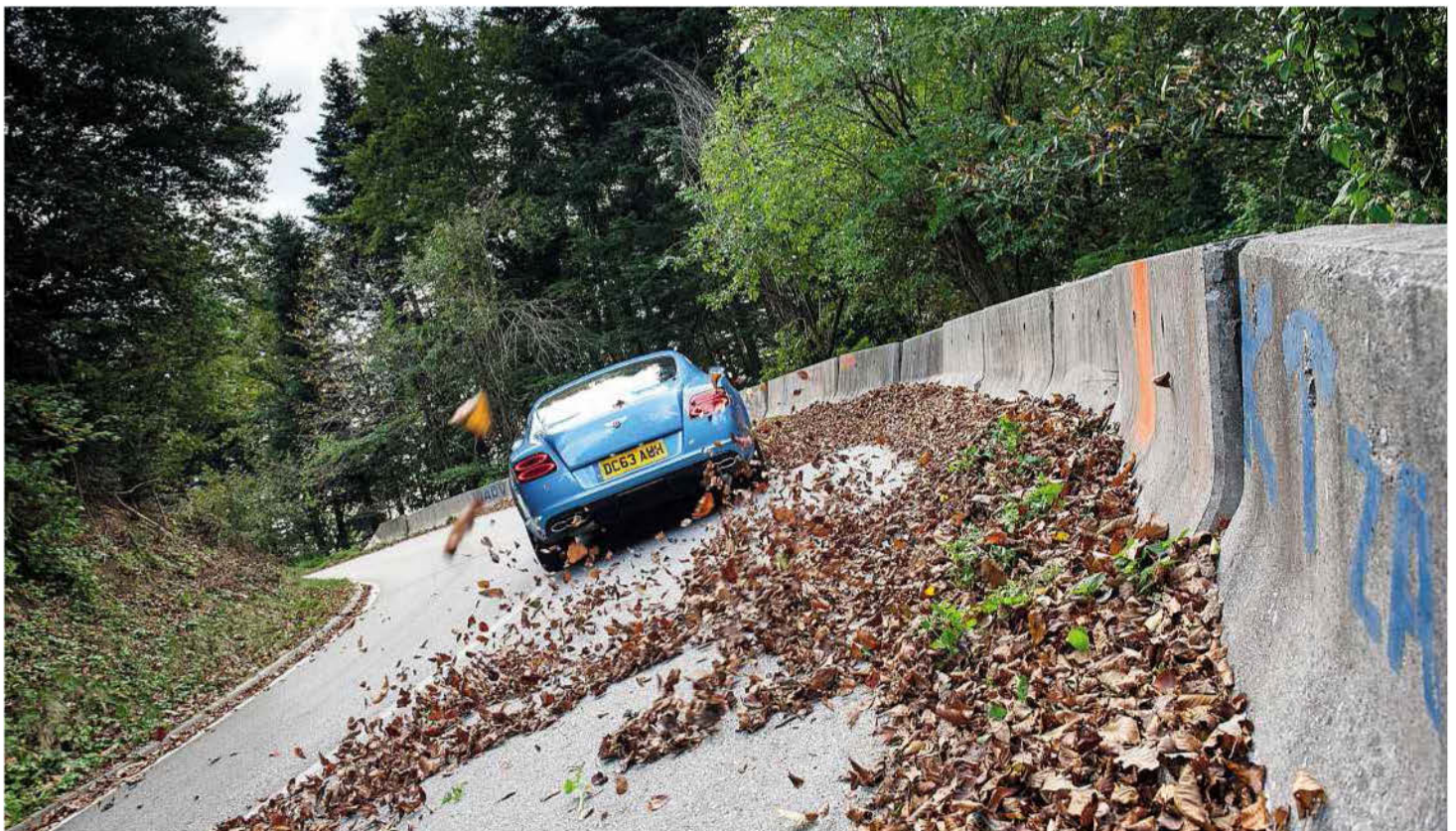
trunks. The rustling subsides and silence returns. Perhaps it's just an overactive imagination, but it feels like Smiley, Bond or Reacher ought to be standing here, turning the collar up on their coat and driving their hands a little deeper into their pockets as they wait for contact to be made. The long drive down from Vienna, crossing through Slovenia on the way, would have made them glad to get out and stretch their legs if they had been in anything other than a Bentley.

Our mission isn't quite the stuff of Le Carré or Fleming (although the Bentley is obviously Bond-appropriate), but we are on another voyage of discovery in our never-ending quest to find the world's greatest driving road. Our target stretch of tarmac this time is somewhere that I've wanted to go for about three years. Currently it's still around 600 miles away, but I'm hoping that the journey to get there will be something to savour in itself. Apart from its spotty hounds, the Dalmatian coast has become known as a glamorous summer playground for the rich and famous (one of the reasons why we thought the Bentley would fit in rather nicely). But as well as the beaches, the yachts and the historic Roman remains, there is also a road. It's called the D8 and it tracks the coastline doggedly along the Adriatic in what I hope is a sort of European equivalent of California's Pacific Coast Highway.

We'll get to the seaside tomorrow, but the adventure has already



Above: most of the route hugged Croatia's gorgeous coastline.
Left: map of the Opatija road circuit, north of Rijeka. **Above right:** on the real thing





Clockwise, from left: classy touches throughout Conti's cabin; V8 lighter than W12, helps agility; 100-octane fuel about a quid a litre; overlooking Zagreb from top of Mount Medvednica; Catchpole likes a road atlas; first hairpin on the Opatija circuit; tuneful pipes

begun well. Photographer Aston Parrott and I picked up the Kingfisher Blue Continental GT V8 S in Vienna (the nearest Bentley dealership!), and about the time we discovered that the seats not only cooled as well as heated, but also back massaged, we decided that we'd chosen well. I've done lots of country crossing in track-biased, aero-screened lightweights in the past, so enjoying a bit of fast-paced, chiropractically sympathetic luxury feels entirely justified this time.

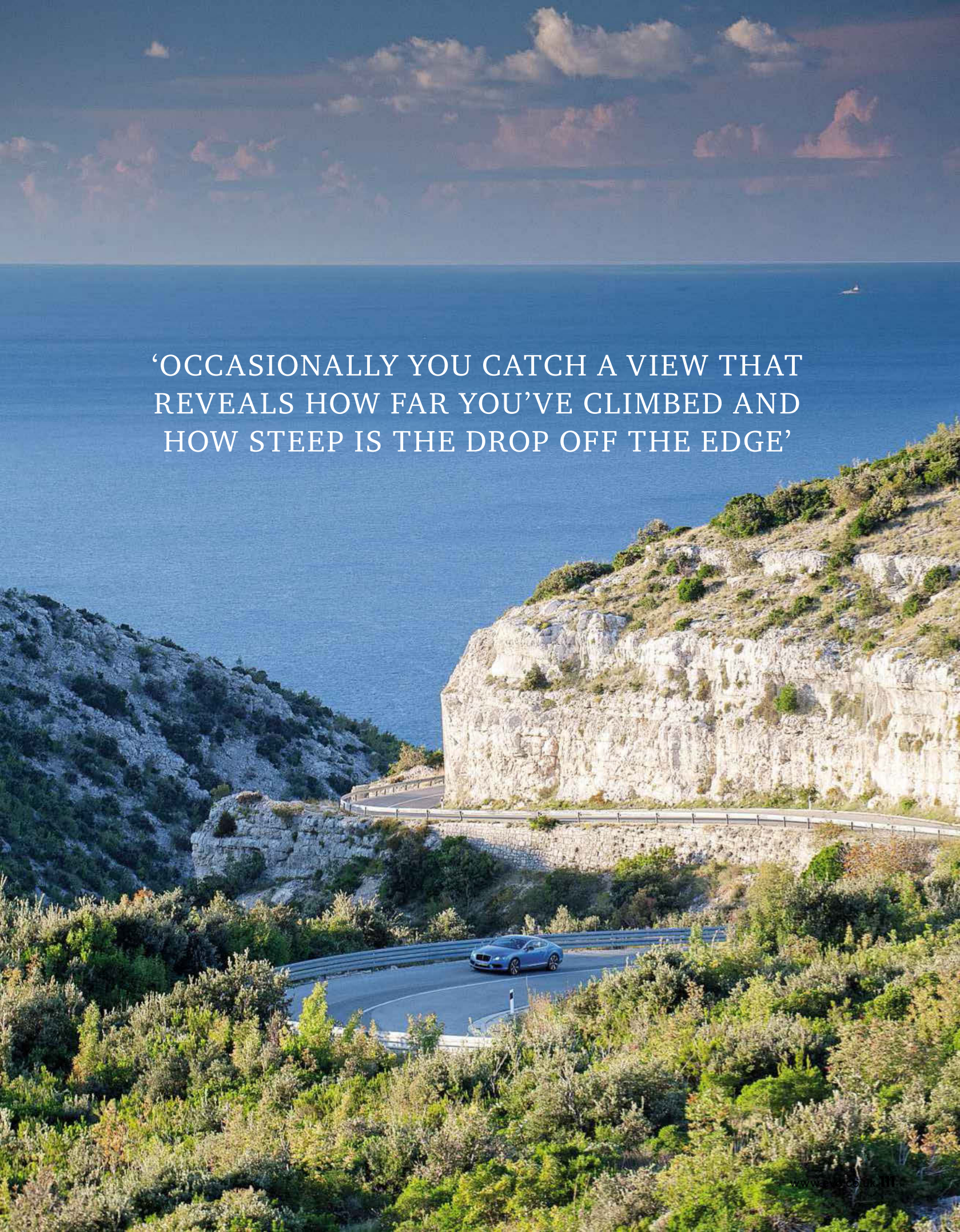
As we arrived in Croatia a couple of hours ago, the first thing I did was stop at a petrol station and buy a road atlas. Useful though satnav is, I still like the ability to pore over a bit of solid cartography. I hadn't intended to stop at Zagreb, but there's something enticing and exciting about a name beginning with a Z. So, when a quick perusal of the atlas showed a viewpoint on the northern edge of Croatia's capital with squiggly lines leading up to it, it was too much to resist.

Bear Mountain (which is what Mount Medvednica roughly translates as) rises up over 1000m and the climb on the north side is very good. It's a two-lane road but it feels tight – a sensation exacerbated by the dense forestation that hems you in. The tarmac rarely runs straight for more than a few seconds and the kerbing has been given stripes here and there so it has the feel of an abandoned circuit. Just occasionally the trunks recede and for a few fleeting seconds you catch a glimpse of a view that reveals just how far you've climbed and how steep is the drop off the edge.

On the map it looked as though there were two ways down the other side of the mountain, but as we reached the junction at the top there was a no entry sign standing guard over one of the roads. It turns out that an extensive one-way system is in place. Over 20 hairpins are packed into the eastern road that climbs up from Zagreb, then there's a beautiful run westwards along a ridge to the adjoining spur before you plunge back down through the forest towards the outskirts of Zagreb on a narrow single-track ribbon. If you set off from the city and realised you'd left the oven on, you'd have a 16.5-mile round trip via the summit to go back and turn it off.

It's that return ridge where I'm standing now. The air is clear and crisp but Zagreb far below is wreathed in a thin mist. The old Renault Clio that was here when we arrived has potted off and the mountain seems deserted now. Perhaps it's the feeling of teetering on an invisible border where Eastern and Western Europe meet, but there's definitely a slightly strange atmosphere up here. Once Aston's finished taking photos it feels even more comforting than usual to shut the hefty door and settle back into the quilted and heated surroundings of the Conti GT.

Our target for the rest of the day is to reach the city of Rijeka, which sits at the northernmost point of the coast. It's rush hour in Zagreb and to be honest the Bentley sticks out like hernia in the belly of the suburbs. It's at least £100k more expensive than any other car we see and there's sometimes the feeling that because the other traffic is trying to give the Conti a wider berth than normal, an accident seems even more likely. A particularly worrying moment occurs where the screeching sound of locked budget tyres rises above the general drone of traffic and I fear that an elderly Xsara is about to rear-end us at a roundabout. Fortunately a gap in the traffic appears just before the crunch (which would probably have demolished the Citroën) and I extricate us with a healthy amount of throttle. The rest of the 100 miles to Rijeka passes uneventfully and after a couple of laps of a one-way system we settle on the Hotel Continental, which

A scenic landscape photograph showing a winding asphalt road carved into a steep, rocky cliffside. The cliff face is light-colored with some sparse green vegetation. Below the road, a dense forest of green trees and shrubs covers the lower slopes. In the background, a vast blue ocean stretches to the horizon under a sky with scattered white and pinkish clouds. A small white boat is visible on the water in the distance. A blue car is driving on the road in the foreground.

‘OCCASIONALLY YOU CATCH A VIEW THAT
REVEALS HOW FAR YOU’VE CLIMBED AND
HOW STEEP IS THE DROP OFF THE EDGE’



‘TRAFFIC IS SPARSE, AND WHAT VEHICLES THERE

seems like an appropriate place to kip for the night (even though it turns out to be somewhat less luxurious than the car).

The following morning we head north. This is not a mistake. Before I head off to a country I usually do a bit of investigation. Sometimes it's as easy as typing something like 'motorsport Croatia' into a search engine, but sometimes it takes a bit more work to dig up some sights to see. This was one such occasion. The Preluk/Opatija circuit is an old road circuit situated right in the crook of Croatia's coastline. It was first used in 1939 for the Adriatic Grand Prix, then held sports car races in the 1950s and Formula 3 races up until 1968. Latterly it was only used for two-wheeled antics and was known as the Monaco of the Grand Prix motorcycle world until the last race was held there in 1977. Like so many places, it was eventually shut simply because it was deemed too dangerous, with two deaths in '77 being the final nails in the coffin.

The reason it wasn't easy to stumble upon online is that the original 1939 race took place while this bit of land was part of Italy, and from the end of the Second World War to June 24, 1991, this area (like the rest of Croatia) was in Yugoslavia. Old maps of the circuit reveal that the layout of the roads remains exactly the same today as it was 37 years

ago, so it's relatively easy to drive a lap of the 3.7-mile track. Set off from the pits in a clockwise direction and the road curves left around the bay with its bobbing boats. A huge stone wall appears on your right with a faded 'AutoMotor' mural on it and then you have to turn back on yourself around an extremely acute hairpin that apparently had cars reversing if they didn't get it exactly right back in the day. From here you climb precariously (rock face one side, no barriers the other) and quickly until you're high above the pits. An oblique junction marks the summit and the start of a terrifyingly fast run back down to the second switchback of the lap. This hairpin is a no-right-turn for traffic today, so either you have to pick your moment carefully or carry on and turn round.

Hairpin negotiated, the road continues in a headlong rush back downhill, with a lengthy straight to build up speed then two sets of tricky esse-bends that dive fast right, then tighten for the left and threaten to give you a soaking in the Adriatic if you get them wrong. If you had time to look at the view, you'd see the slightly faded glory of Opatija across the bay and instantly understand the comparisons with Monte Carlo. Back in what used to be the pits, we spend an hour or so taking a few more photos and drinking in the atmosphere. It must have been so fast, and the 81



ARE, THE BENTLEY DISPATCHES WITH DISDAIN'

metres of elevation change only add to the intimidation. There's nothing much left to tell you it was once a circuit, but if you're a sentimental sod like me, then once you know what occurred you can't help but look at everything through sepia spectacles, imagining ghostly grids.

By midday we've retraced our steps past Rijeka and the Bentley's big bluff grille is pointing south on the D8. Initially there are relatively frequent towns and villages that we have to slow for, but once we're south of Senj the Continental really couldn't wish for a better road. Fast, flowing and well surfaced, the tarmac constantly ducks in and out of the coastal headlands sweeping around inlets and coves. Sometimes the road seems to be cut into the rock halfway up a cliff, moments later you find you've descended almost to sea level, waves practically lapping at the asphalt.

The V8 has been our engine choice for a Conti GT ever since it was introduced two years ago. Lovely though the big W12 is, the lighter V8 improves agility noticeably and brings the whole package alive. The Continental never tacks through direction changes with the incisiveness of an out-and-out sports car, but good grief it can cover some ground. As long as you don't ask too much of the front tyres on the way into a corner you can get on the power remarkably early thanks to the four-wheel drive

and you'll be fired out with a secure but definitely rear-biased attitude.

Mile after mile we thunder south. Away from the motorways there don't seem to be any speed cameras and traffic is sparse. What vehicles there are, the Bentley's 502lb ft dispatches with the disdain of crumbs brushed from a tablecloth. With so little around, you get a sense of what it must have been like to do a big journey in the days when Benji and Woolf were racing against trains and throwing parties. We even have a slightly carefree attitude to our fuel consumption – not only are we cruising on just four cylinders whenever the engine is unstressed, but 100 octane fuel is only about 11 kunas a litre, with about 10 kunas to the British pound.

Just once we venture inland up a switchbacking climb into the hills, but otherwise we stick to the D8 with our sights set on the city of Zadar, where we're planning to overnight. As we get nearer, the sky is bruising darkly with a gathering storm and by the time I close the curtains in the hotel, the first big drops of rain are beginning to fall.

THINGS HAVE ABATED A LITTLE BY THE MORNING BUT it's clear we're in for a rather wet and windy day. The D8 gets more populated between the cities of Zadar and Split, so we cut back onto



the spookily quiet A1 motorway for a couple of hours' cosseted, cruise-controlled comfort before heading back to the coast. The view as we approach the D8 again is the most spectacular yet and even with the stormy skies it looks stunning. The roads feel as slippery as you'd expect given that this is probably the first rain they've seen here for weeks or even months, and although the Bentley's steering is a little lacking in feedback, you get the confidence to push on from the sheer traction that the car musters out of corners.

Possibly because there was a VW factory across the border in Sarajevo, Croatia seems fascinated with early VW Golfs. This is an obsession shared by Aston. Much of Wednesday afternoon is spent playing Golf. Not the noble pastime presided over by the Royal and Ancient, but a new sport where Aston has to photograph every Mk2 Golf we pass. Such is the frequency of the angular hatchback that in days gone by when it was Fujifilm not memory cards, this would have been a game as expensive as donning plus fours and swiping at a Titleist. After a while it becomes a little tedious so the game evolves into me trying to spot upcoming Golfs before Aston does and then distracting him so he misses the photo. Such fun.

As the scores rack up and the miles slip beneath the Bentley's huge 21-inch wheels, the D8 quietly slips away from the coast a little and begins passing acres and acres of orange trees. They're growing in serried ranks so vast that they look almost like paddy fields and provide yet another extraordinary view. All the while we have also been drawing inexorably closer to the trickiest part of our whole journey. Back in 1699 the Treaty of Karlowitz was signed at the conclusion of the Austro-Ottoman War and the Republic of Ragusa (where Dubrovnik sits) was separated from Dalmatia (which was owned by Venice) by a buffer of land. Several other wars and treaties came and went, but the end result is that modern-day Croatia exists in two non-contiguous parts and in order to reach our desired piece of road we need to cross through six miles of Bosnia.

I've been a little wary of border crossings ever since I spent 18 tense hours trying to get a McLaren into Morocco a couple of years ago (*evo* 173). This could be worse. Croatia was accepted into the EU (after a little bit of sulking from Slovenia) in 2013. Bosnia, however, isn't in the EU, which has made this border crossing one of the prime ways of smuggling stolen cars out of the EU. Obviously two slightly scruffy chaps in a £150,000 Bentley that isn't theirs shouldn't have any problems at all...

Sure enough we get hauled over at the border and have to stand next to the car while four stern-looking uniforms open the whole car up and rifle through the paperwork. I'm getting a bit worried but then I remember I've got a copy of *evo* with me, and after showing that to them by way of explanation, everything improves markedly. Which is a relief.

We don't risk stopping in Bosnia and they seem happier to let us back into Croatia again on the other side, so just as the sun is setting an hour later, we roll across a spectacular suspension bridge into Dubrovnik. Walking into the fortified old city in search of pizza it feels like we've wandered onto a film set (I've never watched it, but apparently *Game of Thrones* is partly filmed here). It's quite incredible. Although Dubrovnik was besieged for seven months in 1991 by the Yugoslav People's Army and suffered significant damage from shelling, you'd never know. It feels like the perfect end to our journey. But there's still one day left...



Clockwise, from left: ferry across to the island of Korcula; dramatic sky crowns Dubrovnik; Bentley's cabin helps Catchpole make light of the long journey; two scruffy blokes in someone else's expensive Bentley meant a certain degree of hassle at the border with Bosnia

TECH ANALYSIS

CYLINDER DEACTIVATION

As car makers chase fuel efficiency and lower emissions, performance brands need to be clever to find efficiency in high-capacity units. In its Continental V8 S, Bentley employs a technology called 'variable displacement', which enables individual cylinders to be deactivated when only low power is demanded.

It all boils down to pumping losses in large-capacity power units. When cruising, a driver only uses a small percentage of total power output, and this means the throttle plate is almost closed. In this situation, the engine has to work to draw air in, and the more cylinders there are doing this, the more losses you have.

In this scenario, the Bentley system

can move the camshafts across to profiles that close off the valves to four of the cylinders. The fuel injection and ignition on these cylinders are shut down too.

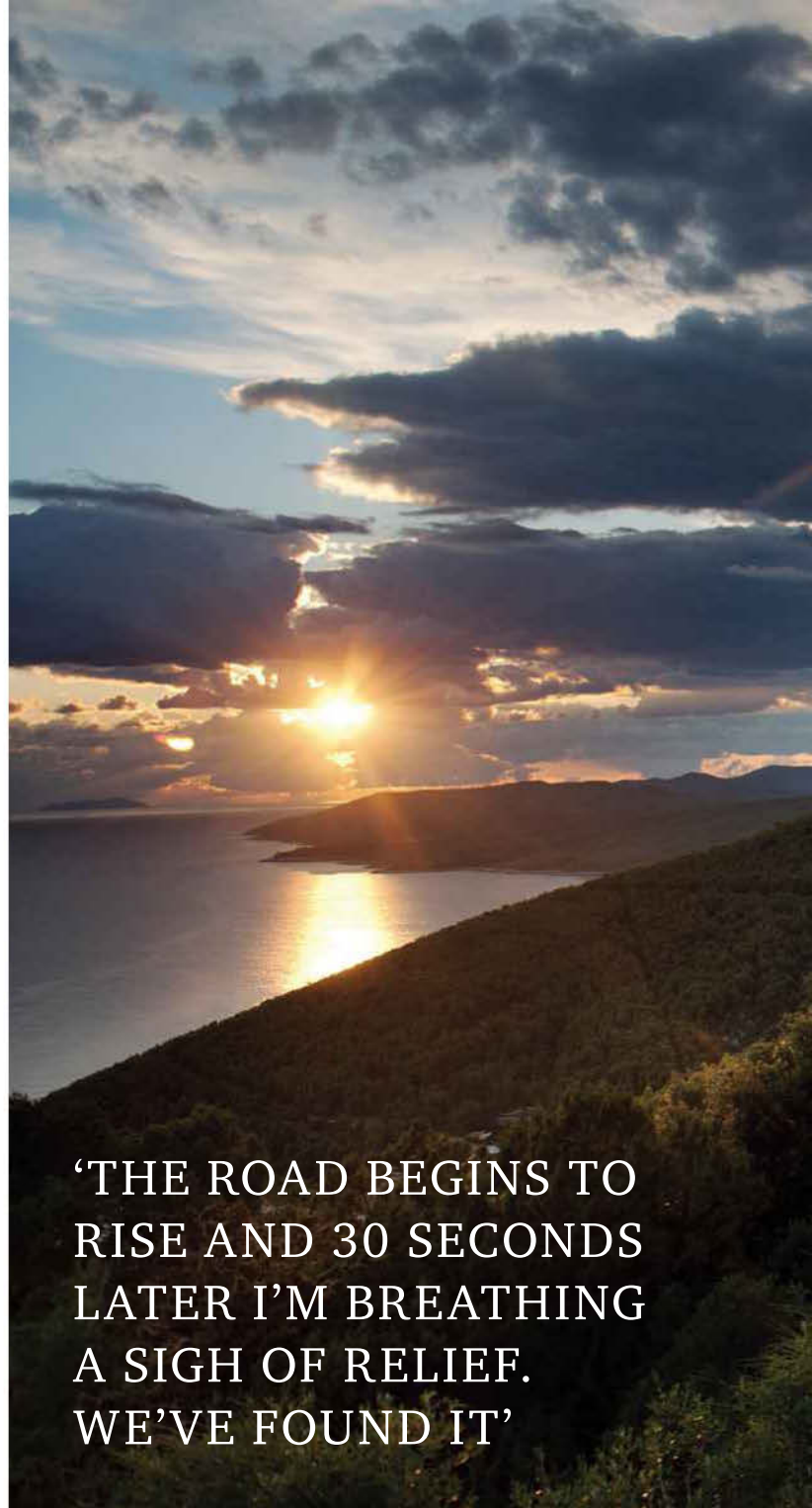
Closing all the valves to a cylinder eliminates pumping losses on that cylinder as there are no gases going in or out. An air spring is created inside the cylinder, and while there is resistance as the piston compresses the gas on its upstroke, this is largely offset by the gas pushing the piston on the downstroke.

Meanwhile, the operating cylinders have to work less hard to draw in air, which increases the pressure in those cylinders, inherently improving efficiency.

Michael Whiteley



Above: beer and pizza in Dubrovnik. **Above, right:** Parrott's passion for Golfs shared by Croatians. **Right:** warning of wild boars on Korcula didn't deter our merry adventurers



‘THE ROAD BEGINS TO RISE AND 30 SECONDS LATER I’M BREATHING A SIGH OF RELIEF. WE’VE FOUND IT’

JUST BEFORE 8.30 THE FOLLOWING MORNING I’M queuing outside a ticket office. We’re catching a ferry. All along the Dalmatian coast there are long thin islands running parallel to the mainland and we’re heading for one called Korcula. A ticket costs about £8 one way for the car and two adults and after a pleasant journey of about 15 minutes we’re deposited amongst a pounce of cats on Korcula.

Two hours later there’s a slightly tense atmosphere in the car. Having driven the entire 29-mile length of the island and crossed its 4.8-mile width more than once, we haven’t found what we’re looking for. We have found some good roads (really good roads, in fact) but none of them are *the* road. It should be on the west of the island and there are only a finite number of roads to explore, but nothing looks right.

Aston is beginning to think that we’ve travelled 1000 miles for pizza in Dubrovnik. I know the road that I’m looking for has a white line down the middle, so it’s out of pure exasperation that I try a single-track road through a vineyard. It has a sign warning of boars, so it sounds fun.

Almost exactly a mile later a white line appears. At the same time, the road begins to rise and 30 seconds later I’m breathing a huge sigh of relief. We’ve found it.

As we get ever higher, the road feels more and more precariously perched, but the view gets commensurately more impressive. At the top we park up, just as we did three days previously above Zagreb, and admire the vista. In the distance, almost lost in the haze, is the craggy grey silhouette of the island of Lastovo. Then comes the azure blue of the sea, sparkling in the sun. The hilly landscape rising steeply up out



of the Adriatic is covered in pine trees and the dark green contrasts wonderfully with the swimming pool-coloured water. And the only interruption in the dark green undulations around us is a thin white pinstripe where the road has been neatly scored into the hillside.

We spend all day here and hardly see another soul. Such is the stillness that the Conti's exhaust note bounces off the rock faces and can be heard echoing around the western side of the island. It seems extraordinary that the same country that provided the chilly foreboding of a Cold War spy novel at the start of our journey now has the ambience of, well, a Cold War spy novel, but the glamorous bit where they follow the villain to his island hideaway. All we need is some company so there can be a car chase. Something for the sequel, might I suggest... ☒

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT V8 S

Engine V8, 3933cc, twin-turbo **CO2** 250g/km **Power** 521bhp @ 6000rpm **Torque** 502lb ft @ 1700rpm **Transmission** Eight-speed auto, four-wheel drive **Front suspension** Double wishbones, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar **Rear suspension** Multi-link, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar **Brakes** Carbon-ceramic discs, 420mm front, 356mm rear **Wheels** 21in front and rear (option) **Tyres** 275/35 ZR21 front and rear **Weight** 2220kg **Power-to-weight** 238bhp/ton **0-62mph** 4.5sec (claimed) **Top speed** 192mph (claimed) **Basic price** £146,000

evo rating: ★★★★★



Sunday morning.

Must be quarter to 11. I'm six or seven laps into my first ever stint in a racing car. The tyres have started to warm through. I'm settling into a rhythm around Anglesey Circuit, but in my peripheral vision I can see a yellow flag waving. The safety car is out. Nobody has spun. Nobody has crashed. I slow down and join the snake of cars. We turn hard left into the pitlane. I drive past my team's garage and on past a piano. Past a male voice choir. Twenty of them, in green blazers and gold ties. This is unusual. This can only be the Race of Remembrance.

THURSDAY EVENING

JAMES CAMERON, *Race of Remembrance organiser and Mission Motorsport founder*

Bloody hell, this is really happening. The weather is appalling, but I'm sat at my laptop in the circuit office tapping out a press release ahead of the race weekend. It all started nine months ago. Christopher Bibb, Anglesey's circuit manager, is one of those guys who 'gets' Mission Motorsport's use of stimulating motorsport to help those who have fallen in the line of service, and he'd offered a weekend event. How exactly that became a full race weekend, with testing, supercar and drift car rides, an eight-hour race, a 20-minute remembrance service, a dinner, an F1 car demonstration and – with Radio Le Mans covering the race – a global audience, I'm not quite certain. But I am sure Chris must have questioned his sanity at times.

The man in the know is Jon Earp, an ex-military helicopter pilot who now flies the North Wales Air Ambulance. When he's not dodging mountains in the clouds, he's been Mission Motorsport's man on the ground, organising the race and doing one hell of a job, made apparent by a packed paddock, 24 racing cars and close to 100 drivers on the entry list. I just hope this foul weather clears.

DAN PROSSER, *evo road tester and racing debutant*

I've driven Anglesey Circuit's short access road countless times before, but never with this unwelcome sense of trepidation. The sun has long since set on north Wales and a thick mist swirls around the paddock in the blustering wind. The rain – inevitably, rain – is gentle, but it falls so persistently that it gives the impression of never stopping. I was already nervous about making my racing debut, but in these hostile, bleak conditions there's a cowardly part of me that just wants to turn right around and go home.

I've been desperate to get myself onto a race grid for years now, but with that very moment right around the corner I suddenly feel out of my depth. The one thing keeping me going is my familiarity with the circuit. I've been testing road cars here for years, so I know the place inside out.

I'm entered in one of two Jota-built Mazda MX-5s. Jim assures me that the car is friendly and benign, but as I try the bucket seat for size I find myself intimidated. It's to do with the race harness, the Alcantara steering wheel, the bank of switches, the tightly fitting roll-cage. They're reminders that this definitely isn't a road car; that this is unfamiliar territory for me.

I'm sharing the no. 76 MX-5 with Richard Parks – a TV presenter, I'm told – race organiser Jon Earp, and professional driver Calum Lockie. I'm looking forward to meeting them all tomorrow. To a soundtrack of lashing rain and howling wind, sleep comes in fits and starts that night.

FRIDAY

JAMES CAMERON

Come Friday morning the sun has broken through. We've fielded a team of blokes and girls supporting six Mission Motorsport racers, ranging from the likes of 24-hour race veteran Gary Dunning, through to two novices, fresh from their ARDS tests. Rookie Lance Corporal Dave Wilkins has been working hard all day to learn the circuit during testing, but he's looking less than confident as dusk stops play.

We've got a TV crew with us this weekend. They're shooting a documentary as former Welsh rugby international Richard Parks makes his race debut. He also looks uncertain. The man has stood on all three poles and the summit of the highest mountain on each of the seven continents, but learning a new car, circuit and sport in such a compressed timescale is challenging even him. By Friday afternoon, he's out of time. Qualifying is tomorrow. Richard comes to find me and he doesn't look happy: 'I need help, mate.'

Christopher Bibb hands us the keys to the circuit in the dark, and we leave the pitlane three-up in a support car. Its adaptive headlights steer into each bend, helping me to point out the kerbs. We talk through five laps slowly, me speaking less as Dave and Richard take over commentary, committing the mantra to memory. Detail done, we do two laps at a proper tempo. There are some expletives from the passenger seat and giggling from Dave in the back. Fun, but it has helped. I hope.

Below: our man Prosser (in red jacket) listens as race organiser and Mission Motorsport boss, Major James Cameron, offers advice. **Top right:** heavy rain during qualifying. **Bottom right:** final preparation in Mission's busy pit garage



DAN PROSSER

The weather is better this morning, but my nerves are no calmer. I'm introduced to my team-mates and the crew of the sister car. It's hard not to feel intimidated in their company – Richard has climbed Everest; Jon flew helicopters in the military; Calum is a former British GT champion. Mike Courts and Davie Birrell, half of the crew of the no. 75 Jota car, each served in the army and suffered life-changing injuries (Mike survived three helicopter crashes while Davie lost both legs below the knee) but they've cast aside their scars of conflict and are here to race. I introduce myself as the bloke who writes about cars.

Just before midday I settle into the MX-5, try to gather my thoughts, and head out for my first few practice laps. I have visions of causing a pile-up, of getting mugged left, right and centre by quicker drivers.

But I don't crash. I'm not a roadblock. With a handful of laps and an overtake or two beneath my belt, I head back into the pitlane. My anxieties float away like smoke in the wind. After my second stint later in the day – 20 or so laps – I've completely fallen for motor racing and all its joys.





SATURDAY

JAMES CAMERON

Qualifying starts in light rain. We've got six servicemen racing this weekend in various cars. Two of them – Mike Courts and Davie Birrell – are in the no. 75 Jota MX-5, which I'm sharing with them. Mike has had a great first season in the Scottish BMW Compact Cup, while Davie wasn't held up by his prosthetic legs on his way to third in the Max5 Championship.

The rain intensifies. The six Mission Motorsport blokes are dotted along the pitlane in various cars and teams, so I flit between them, coaching, cajoling, encouraging and warning them in equal measure. I spare a moment with Dan, who was doing his best to look cool, but my teasing is cut short by Davie bringing the car back into the pits. He's done well. And I'm next man out.

The Jota-prepared car feels like an old friend despite the torrential rain. I've raced one through the night at Silverstone in 2011, and former F1 driver Mike Wilds and I also put the car on the Britcar podium at Brands Hatch. I'm not going to set any records today, though, so I cautiously complete the three laps required to qualify and retire to the pitlane. Despite the downpour, all the cars and all six blokes get through qualifying. The relief is immense and there are wall-to-wall grins, banter and several outright lies being told. Things are looking good for tomorrow's race.



DAN PROSSER

Here comes the rain. The first qualifying session was damp, but as I pull on my balaclava ahead of my session, the rain starts to fall with conviction. Marino Franchitti is here to offer his advice and he seems to spot my uncertainty. A few calming words of wisdom help to focus my thoughts as I head for the assembly area.

I pull onto the circuit behind a gaggle of MX-5s. I've got my windscreen wipers fully lit to try clearing the spray, but all I can see is the dim red lights of the car immediately ahead of me. I follow the little glowing bulbs through the first few corners, but I've clearly got more pace on these Dunlop wet race tyres.

I pass the first car on the back straight, then slip by another. A couple more drop behind in the braking zone at Rocket, the tight left-hander at the top of the hill. The track ahead is clear.

I feel like I've got almost as much grip in this persistent rain as I did in the dry yesterday. I take the same lines; brake in the same places. I'm overcome by a competitive instinct that I've never known before. Nothing comes by and I string together a handful of clean laps. On the 110mph approach to Rocket, though, I hit a river and almost drop the car. It tempers my commitment for the rest of the session.

On pulling into the pits Calum leans in to tell me I'm third fastest. Seriously?! I'm the quickest MX-5 by a second. Yeah, so I probably had an advantage on those trick Dunlops, but nobody's dragging me down from the clouds for the rest of the day. We'll start the race from the second row. Is a podium in sight?



SUNDAY MORNING

JAMES CAMERON

I've refused to look at the weather forecast for days now, but on the morning of the race the sun is shining and I dare take a peak. Unbelievably it looks dry, so at the last moment we get Mike out on slicks for the start of the race. It's a fantastic development opportunity for him. As long as he can manage to get heat into them from a rolling start on a cold, greasy track, that is. Without heat, they're lethal.

I needn't have worried. He manages the frustration of initially losing ground to those around him, and by lap five he's scything through the field, times dropping as the grip comes. He hands over to Davie, tyres still in good condition after a great hour-long stint, and I'm distracted from Radio Le Mans commentary duties by Dave Wilkins' first ever racing laps.

There are some real battles out there on the track, and the lads are getting stuck in. At one point there are six assorted Mission Motorsport cars battling away within a few seconds of each other. Watching them arrive three abreast into the Corkscrew isn't doing my nerves any good, so I wander off for a brew, and to contemplate a career change. The no. 75 car is up to third overall.



Left and top right: remembrance service interrupts the race and is a poignant, powerful occasion. **Below left:** Prosser shares car no. 76, but the MX-5 spent too long on wets to be as competitive as it might have been. **Right:** Prosser in contemplative mood. Note tube to get extra cooling into the cabin



DAN PROSSER

I turn into the fast left-hander at the end of the pit straight. The very first corner of my first ever flying lap in an actual race. The front end washes well wide of the apex. I've carried far too much speed. I rattle over the exit kerb and onto the muddy grass. I'm expecting the car to snap violently, to fire me back onto the circuit and cause a massive pile-up in the single most ignominious maiden racing lap on record. The car stays straight. I gently steer back onto the circuit, brake early for the banked hairpin and feel for grip. Deep breath. Carry on.

I let the tyres warm through over the next couple of laps – we're still on the Dunlop wets despite the dry conditions because we're saving our single set of slicks for the second half of the race – and try to settle into a rhythm. Within a few laps the safety car is out. The pitlane. Piano. Male voice choir. The Remembrance Service. Within minutes of tearing around Britain's most beautiful racetrack, thinking of nothing more than braking points and racing lines, I'm quietly mumbling along to 'O God, Our Help in Ages Past', listening to a verse from the Gospel of John and observing the most moving two minutes' silence I am ever likely to experience.

It's a head-spinning change of cadence. Racing one minute, the next paying my respects to all those service men and women who have lost their lives in conflict over the past 100 years. With a rousing rendition of the national anthem the service draws to a close. All around me cheeks are padded dry and lumps in throats are swallowed. Engines fire. I fall back into the Mazda's bucket seat and attempt to find my composure for the 40-lap stint that lies ahead.



SUNDAY AFTERNOON

JAMES CAMERON

Our hopes for a high finish for the no. 75 car are dashed by a power steering component failure. The pit crew, led by Falklands veteran Tony Compson, springs into action. The documentary team is fascinated by the sight of a road car being pulled apart by the mechanics hunting for parts. It's some time before the director realises that it's his own press car being cannibalised in the name of racing.

There are barked knuckles, cheers and grins as no. 75 makes its way back onto the track, steered by our fourth man, Radio Le Mans commentator John Hindhaugh. Things still aren't right, though, and as the shadows lengthen in the pitlane we resolve to park the car until the closing stages of the race. Davie heads out on the last lap to take the car across the line. He does so to huge applause. Dave Wilkins and his teammates finish in 19th position.

We've done it. It may have been ridiculously ambitious, but the team has pulled it off. It's an amazing end to the season and the future of the event is secure. Significantly, it means we can do that service again. I never want to mark Remembrance Sunday in any other way.



DAN PROSSER

Not for us a strong result. With Calum at the wheel for the start of the race, our no. 76 car actually led for a few laps, but a handful of minor problems and our lack of pace on those wet tyres has cost us too much ground. Nonetheless, at the halfway mark we're still on course to reach the chequered flag.

Richard and Jon complete their first stints without any drama. We switched to our single set of slick tyres an hour ago and I'm desperate to try them as I prepare for my second stint. What a delight! The sticky rubber gives the car more bite on turn-in, better mid-corner grip and much improved traction on exit. I find two full seconds compared with my previous best lap time.

Despite all that, I'm still running 1.8 seconds off Calum's quickest time. I reckon there's a tenth or two through the quick stuff and the same again on braking, but beyond that I've just got no idea where the lap time is. I later realise that it's all about finesse – half a tenth on every turn-in and half a tenth on every exit; perfecting lines and honing technique. It's tempting to think of the very quickest drivers as fearless madmen, but it now seems to me that they're more like flawless driving technicians.

This Jota MX-5 has balance to burn. It's so approachable and so communicative. If going wheel-to-wheel with another car – and coming out on top – isn't the best feeling in all of motoring, I don't know what is.

My pit board signals the end of my second stint and the end of my race. It's a relief to hand the car over to Richard without any damage or indiscretions to my name. He drives smartly for the final 20 laps to consolidate 13th overall and fifth in class.

I'm gutted for the no. 75 crew and their lost running, but my high lasts until bedtime. What an enormous privilege to get my first taste of racing on such a remarkable occasion.

With special thanks to James Cameron, Jon Earp, Calum Lockie, Melindi Scott, Tony Compson and everybody at Mission Motorsport, Anglesey Circuit and Brynteg Holiday Park.

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Fast Fleet

From M4 to McLaren, evo's Fast Fleet is the biggest and most comprehensive long-term section in the business. This month...

BMW M4
by Dan Prosser
Road tester

NEW

Can the latest version of the entry-level M-car worm its way further into our affections with a long-term test?



SKODA OCTAVIA vRS
by Dean Smith
Photographer

It's got a sunroof and wears a bike rack – two things that usually make Smith happy. So why the sad face?



VAUXHALL CORSA VXR
by Dan Prosser
Road tester

OUT

Hill climbs, track outings, timed laps by every member of the evo team... Prosser looks back on six busy months for the VXR.



PORSCHE 911 3.0 SC
by Nick Trott
Editor

More details on the air-cooled 911's underbody overhaul – and why Trott reckons it was worth every penny.



KIA PROCEED GT
by Nick Trott
Editor

The Proceed has become a photographers' favourite after playing an important role at last month's eCoty test.



VW GOLF GTI
by Sam Riley
Film-maker

Chasing a LaFerrari through Wales is all in a day's work for our film-maker's Volkswagen hot hatch.



AUDI R8 V10 PLUS
by Richard Meaden
Contributing editor

Meaden's keeping a tight grip on the Audi's key, and with good reason – this car is just getting better and better.



SEAT LEON CUPRA
by Ian Eveleigh
Production editor

Wet roads, front-wheel drive and 276bhp sounds like a recipe for a miserable winter. Can the Cupra defy expectations?



FORD FIESTA ST
by Henry Catchpole
Features editor

The ST gets put to the test on one of Catchpole's favourite routes, then makes the M6 Toll unexpectedly interesting.



RENAULT CLIO 182
by Sam Sheehan
Staff writer

With its engine back to full health, the Clio's brakes have been drawing attention to themselves...



McLAREN 12C SPIDER
by SSO
Contributor

Can you really use a 616bhp supercar as a daily-driver? So far the Secret Supercar Owner has no complaints.



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NEW ARRIVAL

BMW M4

The latest M-car is proving a difficult one to form a definitive verdict on. Looks like a long-term test is called for...

I THINK IT'S fair to say the new BMW M3/M4 pairing has met with a mixed reception, even within these pages. In the summer (*evo* 199) we pitched the two-door model up against the very best sports coupes on sale at the moment, including the Porsche 911 and Jaguar F-type, and found it to be a worthy, if imperfect, competitor.

In late September, the four-door M3 represented the breed at *evo* Car of the Year in the Scottish Borders. In the company of 2014's most impressive performance cars on those tricky undulating roads – not to mention in the rain and mist – the BMW fared less well. In fact it was voted into ninth position of ten cars, only getting the better of the Audi S1 in the final reckoning.

Clearly, this was a car we were

going to want to spend more time with. Was that M3 simply hobbled by its aggressive Michelin Pilot Super Sport rubber up in Scotland, or is the chassis flawed in a more fundamental way? This Mineral Grey M4 has joined the Fast Fleet for the next few months, giving us every opportunity to get to the bottom of the matter. But let's not be too po-faced about this; I'm going to have a right old giggle running around in a 425bhp sports coupe this winter.

I picked the M4 over the M3 for the simple reason that, to my eye, the coupe looks much more special than the saloon. Seems I'm the only one in the office who thinks so! That grey paintwork and the dark wheels give the M4 a real menace, too, but I'm pleased it has the vibrant Sakhir Orange upholstery to stop it from being too monochrome. Right down

to the carbon interior trim and 'black chrome' highlights, I think the spec is absolutely spot-on.

I have every intention of using the M4 on track at every opportunity – if only because it has so much performance that the circuit really is the only place where it can be stretched right out – so the M Carbon Ceramic Brakes are a very welcome addition. I will try to offer some sort of objective verdict on them, by the way, given that at £6250 they cost more than 10 per cent of the car's basic list price...

Combined with the double-clutch transmission (£2645) and a few other bits and pieces, WVY is near as makes no difference a £70,000 car. There's no doubting the level of performance it returns for that outlay, but we'll find out if the driving experience justifies that sum

of money given the quality of the tackle out there at this price point.

On a personal level I'm also looking forward to living with a paddleshift car, having only ever used manuals in my day-to-day life. I think I have more time for two-pedal cars than some of my colleagues, but time will tell if the lack of a third pedal and a stick erodes some of that all-important interaction and engagement in the long term.

This'll also be the first time I've lived with a sub-25mpg car. Erm, Nick, about that pay rise... ☒

Dan Prosser
(@TheDanProsser)

Date acquired	October 2014
Total mileage	4389
Mileage this month	689
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	22.4





Skoda Octavia vRS

Photographer Smith loves a good sunroof – but not when it's combined with a bike rack. Pass the earplugs...

J JUST LIKE MARMITE, it seems that we drivers either love sunroofs or hate them. There is simply no middle ground. Those that hate them see them as utterly pointless, begrudge the extra weight in the wrong place and moan about how they're just another thing to break.

I, however, am not ashamed to state that I stand in the 'love' corner. I like how they can brighten up a dark interior, I like how the modern 'panoramic' sunroofs look and I am quite taken with the light draft tickling my follically sparse head when they're set to 'tilt'. I am also never going to notice that extra weight when I'm stuck in yet another monster traffic jam on the M25, caused by some berk who can't keep their car between the white lines because they're too busy hash-tagging retro-style pictures of their lunch, or whatever it is these young

people do these days (you can find me on Instagram here: [instagram.com/deanphoto](https://www.instagram.com/deanphoto)).

I've never given any thought to using roof bars with a sunroof before, though. Why would I? As long as the sunroof still opens there shouldn't be any issues, right? Perhaps if it's rained and you have a muddy bike on the roof you'll get some grubby streaks on the sunroof, but I can deal with that. So who would have thought that driving above 15mph with a bike rack and sunroof combination would be like driving with a Capuchin monkey on your shoulder screaming into a harmonica? And that's no exaggeration. The whistling from the rack that pierces through the sunroof is completely unbearable over 45mph.

Being the clever people that Skoda are, the roof bars are quick release (once unlocked) and easy

to install and take off. The only problem is storing them once you have taken them off. Living in a flat doesn't help, and they've already been shooed out of the spare room (aka 'the garage') by my long-suffering wife. I have found that they will, with a little bit of yoga from myself, fit over the rear seats thanks to the generous leg space and large rear-door apertures. But this is not exactly convenient when you have to taxi around more than one passenger.

The solution to all of this is, of course, to order the vRS hatch's bigger and better-looking brother, the vRS Estate. **X**

Dean Smith (@evoDeanSmith)

Date acquired	September 2014
Total mileage	4346
Mileage this month	2941
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	29.7

I I THINK IT'S a measure of how much the Corsa VXR Clubsport worked its way into my affections – and how it was perceived by others – that I spent rather a lot of time defending it. I guess most people just don't expect the hot version of Vauxhall's eight-year-old Corsa to be terribly good. Actually, there were times when it was nothing short of brilliant.

MBV arrived in spring, just a few weeks after I started at **evo**. As a blinkered performance car nut I've got no particular affinity for the common or garden Vauxhall Corsa. In fact, it barely even registers. I have to say, though, judged on looks alone I think Vauxhall did as good a job as anybody else in this sector of the market in turning a plain little hatchback into a snarling pocket rocket. In Asteroid Grey, with dark alloys, smoked rear lights, tinted windows and aggressive bumpers, the VXR Clubsport's styling is absolutely on the money.

That Clubsport moniker did promise a lot. I had briefly hoped for bucket seats, harnesses, a half cage and cup tyres, but in truth the Clubsport is little different to the Nürburgring model that preceded it. It's no stripped-out, track-ready special, then, but with Bilstein dampers, Brembo brakes, a Drexler limited-slip diff and Recaro seats it did at least have all the right kit.

I can vividly remember one particular day with the Clubsport that perfectly highlighted the car's strengths... and its weaknesses. It began with an early start in Northampton to reach Gurston Down hill climb, near Salisbury, 100 or so miles away, for 9am. The dated satnav got me there, but not without a few wrong turns along the way (the little screen makes the map quite tricky to read on the go). The short wheelbase and stiff suspension made for a pretty choppy ride. Add to that the short gearing, noisy cabin and firm seats and it should be no great surprise to learn that the VXR was not suited to long journeys. Just south of the M4 my back started to cry in protest, so it was a relief to eventually reach Gurston Down.

Any moans about backache and ride quality were quickly forgotten

END-OF-TERM

Vauxhall Corsa VXR Clubsport

After six tough months on our fleet, the feisty 202bhp hatch has left us. Prosser recalls the highs and lows



Lee Marshall

as I signed on and taped a set of numbers to the windows. What followed over the next few hours was undoubtedly the highlight of my six months with MBV. During the warmer months Gurston Down runs school days for hill climb novices. A few dozen of us turned up in our road cars, nervously walked the fiendishly narrow course (each of us silently wondering which grass bank we'd shortly be driving into), before strapping on a helmet and pulling up to the start line.

The first couple of hundred metres of the course is downhill, leading into a long left-hander. In the Corsa the entry to that left-hander is right at the top of fourth gear, which feels horribly quick. Get the line just right and it's also flat, if you've got the minerals. Which I didn't.

Long story short, the VXR was absolutely superb at Gurston Down. In the company of Porsches and

TVRs it was one of the quickest cars up the hill. Every single instructor commented on how rapid the thing looked into and out of corners. I had so much fun that it took until two-thirds of the way home for me to grow tired of the Corsa's bruising long-distance manners again.

That's the VXR Clubsport in a nutshell. It's superb on track (as the whole *evo* team discovered during our Fast Fleet away day at Blyton Park) or on the right road, but it doesn't have the depth of ability to back that up with some big-car refinement and useability, which the Ford Fiesta ST absolutely does.

Given that I tend to cover quite a lot of motorway miles, it was the Clubsport's rather narrow comfort zone that ultimately stopped me falling for it entirely. It must be said that despite the thrashing we gave it between us over the past six months it never missed. With the help of my

colleagues I did smoke the original Continentals in just a few thousand miles, but that's to be expected given it was used on track often.

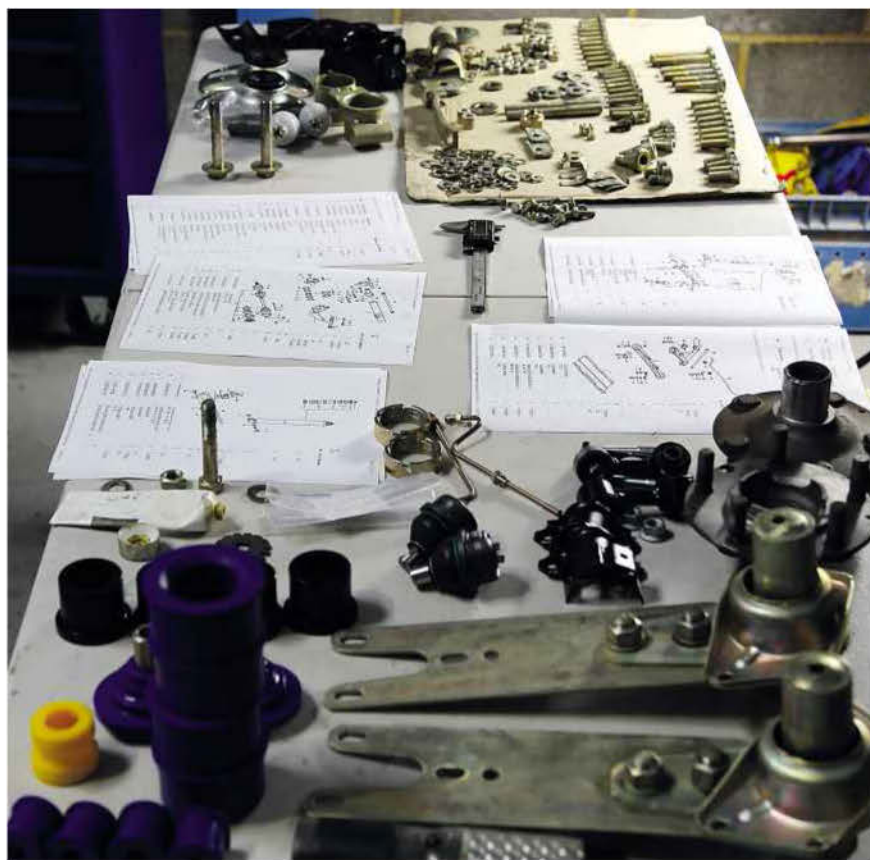
What really does it for the VXR in my mind, however, is that the Fiesta ST is cheaper, even better to drive and much more broadly talented away from hill climbs and back roads. That being said, the sensation of that wonderful Drexler diff and 206lb ft of turbocharged torque hauling me through Gurston Down's tight corners is one that will live with me for a long time yet. **x**

Dan Prosser (@TheDanProsser)

Date acquired	April 2014
Duration of test	6 months
Total test mileage	9286
Overall mpg	30.5
Costs	£601.96 (tyres)
Purchase price	£22,400
Trade-in value	£14,875
Depreciation	£7525

Above: Clubsport relished track work, thanks partly to its Bilstein dampers (bottom). **Below:** aggressive VXR bodywork was a hit with Prosser





Left: new Powerflex bushes (bottom left) and various new or reconditioned parts ready to be fitted.

Bottom: re-zinc spring plate



Porsche 911 3.0 SC

It's a good job values of classic 911s are soaring, as the SC continues to dig deep into Mr Trott's pockets

I IF YOU READ last month's report, you'll know that the kids are sweeping chimneys to put dinner on the table after I spent way more than I budgeted overhauling my old 911's undercrackers. Over the next few months I'll detail each area of renovation – the Bilstein dampers, the engine service, the LumeTechnik LED lights and the various other items that resulted in a four-page bill. But let's kick off with the bushes.

My SC has had all of its rubber bushes replaced with Powerflex polyurethane items. The full list looks like this: 4 x front wishbone inner bushes, 4 x front anti-roll bar bushes, 1 x steering column bearing support bush, 2 x rear trailing arm inner bushes, 2 x rear trailing arm support bushes, 4 x rear trailing arm support plate bushes, 2 x rear anti-roll bar bushes, 2 x engine mount

bushes and 2 x gearbox mount bushes. Total cost: £397.98.

Why spend all this money on small purple plastic donuts you (and my wife) may ask? Well, polyurethane bushes don't degrade like rubber and they enable your suspension to work more efficiently by controlling unwanted flex. Plus, I fitted a set of Powerflex bushes to my AX GT in the '90s and fondly remember the increased agility, sharper steering, and overall 'tightness' of the chassis. I wanted the same for my 911.

The original bushes were over 30 years old and 'looked it' according to Ollie at Porsche specialist RPM Technik. Inevitably, it was also discovered that my car needed top mounts, ball joints, track rod ends, an anti-roll bar drop link, rear wheel bearings and a whole bunch of stuff that I'm still in denial about.

Interestingly, if you have

knackered spring plate bushes you can't buy individual replacements from Porsche – you have to buy the whole spring plate assembly at £396 (£792 the pair). Instead, RPM reconditioned and re-zinc both my existing spring plates, then fitted the Powerflex bushes, for £414 all-in.

The engine and gearbox are now cushioned by four shiny new purple bushes. Ollie warned that some 911 owners regret fitting these polyurethane bushes because they introduce more vibrations into the bodyshell. But I decided to go for it – this is a key area in which drivetrain movement can be tamed, and the whole car shakes and fizzles anyway!

Three hundred miles later I'm in no doubt I made the right call. The steering is more responsive and I can 'read' the road surface much better. Cornering hard, the car has greater control over its mass: under

braking there's increased stability. I'll talk about the Bilstein dampers next month, because they're aiding the renewed focus in the car's chassis.

I bought a 911 with an engine as strong as it was when new – so it performs like it did in 1982. And I bought a 911 that appears to have jumped straight out of a brochure – so it looks as good as it did in 1982. Yet it's always niggled me that with 32-year-old bushes, shonky dampers and assorted worn bearings, mounts, links, etc, that it was never going to feel like an authentic G-series 911 from 1982. It does now. 

Nick Trott (@evoNickTrott)

Date acquired	March 2014
Total mileage	90,077
Mileage this month	334
Costs this month	£3098.60
mpg this month	n/a

Kia Proceed GT

The Korean's dynamics and practicality shone on this year's eCoty



I IT'S BEEN ANOTHER intense month for the Kia. Staff photographer Aston Parrott continues to hog the keys, preferring the car for his numerous airport runs and long-distance schleps, and ace freelance photographer Gus Gregory used it for the long drive up to the Borders for eCoty last month. Indeed, eCoty was largely supported by Kia – we used my GT, a Proceed diesel and a Sorento as our support vehicles and all performed extremely well.

The Proceed GT, once again,

proved a brilliant chase car – punchy enough to stick with the eCoty convoys but comfortable and refined enough to swallow the long distances. Fuel consumption was pretty good, averaging 30mpg for general use (or mid-20s when you're chasing a Ferrari Speciale).

Everyone who drives it seems to agree – the GT is a stylish, well-built and refined hatch that needs a smidge more poke. In short, if Kia decides to make a quicker GT it would have a very good chance at making an eCoty shortlist.

In terms of wear and tear, the GT has covered 12,000 (hard) miles but the paint still gleams, there are no rattles from the interior and the seats are as firm and as comfortable as ever. While we can't prove it, there's a sense that the car will feel just as fresh at 100,000.

There is one faint squeak from the left-front brake that needs investigating. There remains plenty of meat on the pad, and the disc doesn't look worn or scored, so we will keep an ear out. If it gets worse we'll book it in for Kia to have a look.

The Proceed GT is taking whatever we throw at it, and coming back for more. Even its Michelin Pilot Sport 3s are lasting well – 6.3mm of tread remains on the rear, with 3.1 on the front. We'll swap front to back soon, and expect to reach at least 18,000 miles on the set – impressive. ✕

Nick Trott (@evoNickTrott)

Date acquired	May 2014
Total mileage	12,202
Mileage this month	1985
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	30.2

VW Golf GTI

Chasing a LaFerrari: just one of the GTI's chores this month

I IT'S BEEN A fairly awesome few months with the Golf, racking up some great drives. With **evo** Car of the Year and Track Car of the Year (coming soon!), an epic drive around Scotland, and a visit to the **evo** Triangle, you'd think the GTI would have peaked and the highs couldn't get any higher...

Well that was until the LaFerrari v Enzo shoot (**evo** 203). Although a very short stint, the Golf had its Highlight Drive of the Year chasing Jethro in the LaFerrari through the Llanberis Pass and up to the foothills of Snowdon. It was amazing to see the LaFerrari move around through



the twisty high-speed bends and then take off like a rocket down the straights. It dawned on me as I pushed the GTI to its limit that this little game of cat and mouse, with two cars from opposite ends of the **evo** spectrum, defined the notion behind the Thrill of Driving.

I felt utterly confident wringing the neck of the GTI knowing exactly

how it would react to every input. Given the chance to try the LaFerrari, I probably would have driven it like a granny for fear of wrapping it around a telegraph pole.

All this recent dynamic driving got me thinking about the driving modes of the GTI. I've experimented with them all, but I have settled on the following. Through the Individual

set-up menu you can adjust the powertrain, Adaptive Chassis Control and steering separately. I have everything set to Sport but with the damping on Normal (its middle setting). This allows a little more lean in corners than you get with the very tied down feel of Sport, and the Golf's excellent body control means that the extra pliancy can be used to great effect through bumpy corners.

It really feels like the Mk7 GTI is designed for UK roads as it performs so well on them. While there might not always be a supercar to follow, the GTI certainly seems set to serve up some more great British drives. ✕

Sam Riley (@samgriley)

Date acquired	January 2014
Total mileage	18,140
Mileage this month	5,176
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	30.3

Volkswagen Golf GTI

SEAT Leon Cupra 280

276bhp, front-wheel drive and greasy roads? Surprisingly, not a problem, finds Eveleigh



THE DARKER, WETTER months are now well and truly upon us. With your pace tempered by damp tarmac on your way in to work in the morning and then by the complete darkness on your way home in the evening, they can bring about a kind of driver's seasonal affective disorder, especially if you're in the wrong car.

With the Cupra 280 putting 276bhp and 258lb ft through just its front wheels, I had some concerns about how useable (or otherwise) it might be when the roads got greasy. Would it be banging into its traction control with frustrating regularity? Far from it, as it turns out. On slippery surfaces the traction control is really rather excellent. It will allow both front wheels to gently overspeed when exiting a corner, the limited-slip diff doing its thing and the car's nose even washing fractionally wide. This means you can work the Cupra right on its limit of grip without annoying interference. It's only when you get clumsy that the TC cuts in. Which is exactly how it should be.

It's taken me a while to feel comfortably tuned in to the Leon's

steering on wet roads, though. Being electrically assisted, like nearly all modern systems it's low on feel, making it tricky to really know how much grip you've got to play with. Switching the steering to its lightest setting and adopting a more gentle hold on the wheel seems to help. I've also taken to knocking the suspension down to its softest setting when it's wet in order to give the tyres the best chance of maximising the reduced grip levels. It's a subtle difference, but it seems to work, and the increased roll also gives you a clearer picture of 'where you're at' when cornering.

As for the dark evenings, the Cupra's full LED headlights do a fine job of illuminating the situation, being as bright as a decent set of xenons, but with a more even spread of light. OK, they're not as bright as a row of rally-spec spotlights, but they consume a lot less energy. **X**

Ian Eveleigh

Date acquired	March 2014
Total mileage	12,588
Mileage this month	1686
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	31.1

Audi R8 V10 Plus

Nearly 14,000 miles in, and Meaden's still hanging on to the R8 – and it appears to be getting better with age

THE R8 AND I are currently living on borrowed time. To be honest I thought the V10 Plus might have gone back by now, but you won't find me complaining about its continued presence in my life. Frustratingly, a few work-related trips and a backlog of writing has meant I've not been making the most of my last few weeks of custodianship, but those miles I have done have unfailingly confirmed what a special car it is.

In nearly 14,000 miles of everyday use, nothing (well, apart from the slow-witted satnav) has annoyed me or been found wanting. That's quite an achievement given the inherent compromises of a mid-engined two-seater.

It's wearing extremely well, too; even the right-hand bolster of the driver's seat has resisted abrasions from me sliding into the seat when parked in confined spaces. There's a fine dusting of tiny scuffs on the alloy gearknob from contact with my wedding ring, and a few stone chips on the nose, but to me that's patina, not wear; evidence of a car used as its maker intended.

I also think the engine is getting stronger with miles. It's something I began to sense a few thousand miles ago, and though it's hard to be certain about these things, I'm convinced it's revving even more sweetly and pulling a fraction harder when you really give it everything. I reckon the gearshift is a fraction



sweeter, too, especially on cross-gate shifts. I'm not sure you'd notice such fractional improvements in a more automated, less analogue car, but the R8 is an extremely tactile machine and we've been pretty much inseparable since it arrived at the beginning of March. Indeed I'm not sure I've ever been more dialled in to a long-term test car than

KY14 BKV. And right now it's feeling better than ever. **X**

Richard Meaden
(@DickieMeaden)

Date acquired	March 2014
Total mileage	13,699
Mileage this month	879
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	18.1

Audi R8 V10 Plus

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Ford Fiesta ST

The 179bhp hot hatch gets the chance to tackle one of Catchpole's favourite roads – and it doesn't disappoint



THE LIFE OF a long-termer is not necessarily a glamorous one. It's the car that gets left in long-stay at airports. It's the car that trundles between the office and home in rush-hour traffic. It is the car that I pile bicycles and shopping into. The mark of the Fiesta's brilliance is that it's a frabjous little thing even on these dull journeys. All it takes is a half-

decent corner or a vaguely empty roundabout and it summons a smile.

However, last month URN had a trip to north Wales. It must have seemed like a holiday and it certainly seemed to enjoy it. The Wales Rally GB (and Cambrian Rally) media day was being held at the Llyn Brenig Café, which just so happens to be on the **evo** Triangle, and to get there I've got a fantastic back-road route

across from Shrewsbury.

The Fiesta didn't disappoint. It flew well over the humpback bridge, it tackled the almost flat-out chicane with aplomb and it was just brilliant through the later tighter lanes. The engine seems to be running even more sweetly on its diet of 99 RON too, with slightly improved throttle response and greater smoothness as it climbs

through the revs. Worth the extra pennies per litre I would say.

Overall the little ST wasn't quite as tied-down and precise as my old Mégane R26.R was over the same roads (although it's hard to think what would be) but it will be interesting to see if the new Continentals, due any day, add some more control. The OE Bridgestones are fun but really do break away early, particularly in the wet, and as the ST oversteers at the drop of a hat it can make fast corners feel just a little unnerving on damp tarmac.

Bizarrely it was the long entry ramp to the M6 Toll on the way home that served up the biggest surprise of the whole journey. Minding my own business on constant throttle and steering inputs, I was suddenly aware that the Fiesta was trying to fall into oversteer and only being held back by the ESP. Even after a day in Wales it was making the mundane seem interesting. **✖**

Henry Catchpole
(@HenryCatchpole)

Date acquired	July 2014
Total mileage	6374
Mileage this month	991
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	39.7



Renaultsport Clio 182

Disappointing brakes are causing frustration

IM PLEASED TO report that the recent belt change and timing correction have made the Clio ever so slightly more effortless to drive on the daily commute. I'm squeezing the throttle pedal about half a centimetre less

for low-revs progress thanks to the salvaged torque, and the car's running better overall. Happy days.

Or so I thought. As often seems to be the way with us petrolheads, we're never entirely happy with our cars. Whilst the Clio's more enthusiastic engine entertains on the straights, I've begun to notice the brakes are feeling increasingly average. There's bite, but I really have to squeeze the pedal to get it.

Refurbished calipers, new discs and pads, braided lines, a new master cylinder and fresh fluid have all been added recently, so the cause of this poor stopping power is unknown, and as a result, really frustrating. The wallet's taken quite a hit trying to solve it, too.

At low speed the problem is almost unnoticeable, with only the slightest amount of dead pedal travel hinting at the issue.

Unsurprisingly, it's when I arrive at a corner carrying a good rate of knots that I find myself considering which part of the hedge to aim at.

It's a real shame, especially as in every other respect the car drives better than ever. The new-ish suspension feels great, the engine and gearbox as though they've covered half their six-figure mileage.

It looks like I'll be spending my lunch breaks surfing the net for performance pads. It's pretty much the last port of call, but with more **evo** trackdays planned for next year, I can easily justify it... **✖**

Sam Sheehan
(@evoSamSheehan)

Date acquired	May 2011
Total mileage	105,610
Mileage this month	1533
Costs this month	£498 (brakes)
mpg this month	36.4

C70

3527

C70 3527 GT CHRONOMETER – LIMITED EDITION

GT



The C70 3527 GT – named from the chassis number of the seventh Ferrari 250 GTO to leave the Maranello gates and from which it has a precious fragment of body panel in the case back – is a limited edition of 100.

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Created exclusively for newcomers to the sport, the Ginetta Racing Drivers Club is aimed at drivers with a desire to test their mettle at racing, offering step-by-step support as they move from the UK roads to some of the finest GT circuits in the country, best of all, the road-legal racer is yours to keep!

The all-inclusive package includes everything required to begin competing; you buy the car and we give you 12 months road tax, an ARDS racing licence, two track days with expert tuition plus entry into a four weekend racing series at the best UK circuits with full mechanical and emotional Ginetta support.

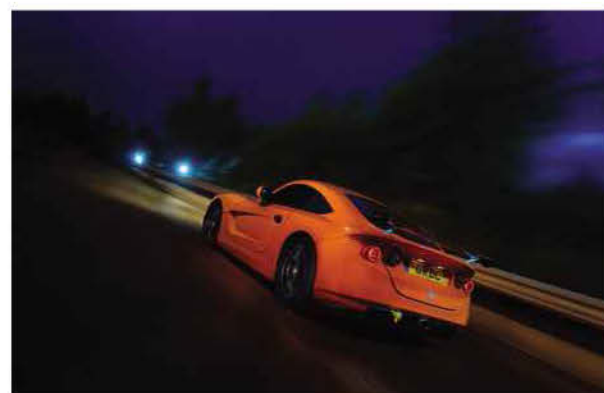
Once you catch the racing bug, you can progress up the motor-racing ladder through the GRDC+, Protyre Motorsport Ginetta GT5 Challenge or the Michelin Ginetta GT4 SuperCup and beyond.

GRDC+ provides Ginetta G40 Club Car owners with an arena in which to compete throughout their second year of racing, however, entry isn't reserved solely for graduates of our novice series, as new owners can choose to enter at level two, and still enjoy all the member benefits, whilst racing amongst drivers of similar ability and experience.

Not only that, but all Ginetta Racing Drivers Club and GRDC+ members are invited to join Lawrence Tomlinson on a number of social events throughout the year, including golf days and a road trip to the Le Mans 24 Hour, with accommodation provided at a traditional French chateau, just outside Arnage.

Over the past five years, Ginetta has supported over 300 drivers taking their first steps into the thrilling world of motor racing and have established clear routes for them to progress from entry-level racing, all the way through to the pinnacle of sports car competition; the Le Mans 24 Hours.

Realising your dream has never been easier, Ginetta have a number of test days around the UK throughout the year. You don't need any prior racing experience or a car, just a valid UK driving licence and a desire to have fun.



Ginetta will be at Brands Hatch on 6th February and 11th March 2015, and are able to offer additional test days on request.

McLaren 12C Spider

As he enters his second month with 12C Spider no. 2, the SSO is finding life with a McLaren as a daily driver is still sweet

S SINCE MY LAST report it has been a fairly relaxed time for the McLaren 12C Spider. Of the past five weeks, the 12C has had three off, as I was away on an extended business trip across several continents. When I finally returned, the Spider started up right away and after a few cranky moments settled into a smooth idle. Once again I cannot understate the value of leaving a car on a battery conditioner when it is going to sit for more than a few days.

So far the compromises needed to use a 12C Spider in a daily capacity have been very minimal. After having the car's nose touch the ground slightly once, I now always use the front axle lift function when both exiting the driveway and entering the office garage. The other change really isn't a compromise but a driving style change that's required when I'm *not* in the 12C Spider. On my commuting route there are a couple of very tight merges on and off the highways. In the McLaren you get used to braking quite late before merging into traffic. But when I had to take another car to the office one day as a rather large package needed



‘About half the petrol-station stops include a discussion with another patron on what the car is, how fast it goes and how great it looks’

to be collected, I almost had a rude surprise when it didn't quite slow with the same cool confidence.

Reliability has been excellent, with one minor annoyance. Since the most recent software upgrade, I have discovered that the IRIS infotainment system will not initiate if you open the car using the under-door button (Swipe 2.0). You need to open the doors by double clicking the unlock button on the fob to get all the systems to start up properly. While not exactly the end of the world, it does bring back unpleasant memories of the original IRIS...

One of my other small bugbears with the 12C has always been its smallish fuel tank (72 litres). In the world of daily use I am finding that a

trip to the petrol station is required roughly once a week. At least the damage to the wallet is fairly minimal – petrol has dropped to £0.47 per litre here in the States...

With the shortening of the days, the temperatures have started to fall to a point where having the roof open at least once each day is now becoming the norm. While the decision to open the roof is a spur-of-the-moment call, I am finding that in general it stays closed in the mornings and is always open on the way home in the evenings.

The general reception to the 12C Spider has remained excellent, with zero negative incidents to report. About half the petrol-station stops include a discussion with another patron on what the car is, how fast it goes and how great it looks. Overall, daily life with the 12C Spider continues to be a pleasure. **X**

Secret Supercar Owner
(@SupercarOwner)

Date acquired	August 2014
Total mileage	858
Mileage this month	252
Costs this month	£0
mpg this month	16.0



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Rolls-Royce Phantom

2007/07, 13,900miles, 2 Owners, Silver with Biege, Rear Screens, Sunroof £126,999

Rolls-Royce Ghost

Choice of four cars in stock, From £114,950

Rolls-Royce Phantom DHC

2008, 24,900miles, Black with Satin bonnet, Seashell leather, Teak Decking £169,995

Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud MK2

Factory Convertible, LHD, 1962, 59,000miles, FSH, Charcoal Metallic £499,999

Bentley Continental Supersports

Choice of GT and GTC Supersports in stock, From £74,999

Bentley Continental GTC

Choice of six cars in stock, From £52,999

McLaren MP4-12C

2013/13, 5,300miles, Carbon Black with Black Sports Exhaust, Stealth Pack £144,950

Ferrari California

2009, 20,000miles, 2+2, Red with Cream leather Ceramic brakes, F FSH £94,999

Audi R8 V10

Manual, 2010, 15,500miles, Black/Black, Carbon side blades, Sat Nav, B&O Sound £68,999

Aston Martin DB9 Volante

Auto, 2009/09, 34,900miles, Torro Red, with Ivory leather, stunning car £54,999

Aston Martin V8 Vantage

Convertible, 2012, 15,900miles, Manual, Black Black, Sat Nav, R/Cam, B&O Sound £68,999

Bentley Azure

Choice of three cars in stock, From £57,999

Ferrari F430 Spider, 2007/57, 10,500miles, Red with Cream, loads of carbon fiber extras, fresh service, £82,999
 Bentley Brooklands 2008, 34,000miles, Verdant Green with Burnt Oak Quilted Leather £99,999
 Bentley Arnage, Choice of six cars in stock, from £29,999
 BMW M4 Convertible, 2014/64, 1owner, Black/Black, Comfort Package, Professional Nav VAT Q .. £69,999
 Porsche Cayenne, choice of cars in stock, both Black/Black, 2013 V8 Turbo and 2011 3.0l Diesel, from £41,999
 Mercedes S65 AMG Limousine, 2004/04, 49,000miles, Blue/Cream, Rear DVD, Big Spec £17,999
 Maybach 57, 2004/04, 38,000miles, Black with Beige, Rear entertainment, fridge, huge spec £84,999

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Market Watch

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ALPINA ROADSTER S

Rare tuned version of BMW's Z4 marks the end of an era for its maker

MENTION TWEAKED BMWs and most people think of the much-loved 'M' cars. But what about the less obvious products of Alpina?

There will be few **evo** readers who haven't heard of Alpina, but not all will realise that 2015 marks half a century since Alpina was officially founded, after Burkard Bovensiepen created his first twin-carb conversions for the BMW 1500 in a shed around the back of his family's typewriter factory.

Within three years the typewriters were out of the window and Alpina was fully focused on building hot BMWs, with drivers such as Derek Bell, James Hunt, Niki Lauda and Jackie Ickx going on to prove their worth with a raft of touring car victories during the late 1960s and early '70s.

Around the same time, BMW tasked Alpina with creating a version of its 3.0 CSL for touring car racing, the result being the legendary, lightweight 'Batmobile' that, as a homologation model, was supplied with a rear wing packed away in the boot – because using it on German roads was illegal.

Dozens of Alpina models have been created since, but we would tip the Roadster S as being the one to invest in. Available from 2004 to 2008, it was the last Alpina to have its engine – a 3.4-litre in-line six – hand built at the Buchloe factory before all mechanical work shifted to BMW's Munich line (nowadays, only the final trimming is done at Alpina HQ).

Based on the Z4, the Roadster S offered 300bhp, 267lb ft, 165mph, significant suspension

upgrades and the all-important manual gearbox. Subtle styling tweaks and special Alpina wheels also gave the car greater presence, while the interior got more leather. The result earned four-and-a-half **evo** stars (issue 066).

Sytner, the UK's sole BMW agent for Alpina in the UK since 1983, struggled to shift the first Roadster Ss and eventually dropped prices of both the standard and 'Lux' versions to below £40,000. Today they start from as little as £10,000.

Rear-wheel drive, 300bhp, six-speed manual, up to 32mpg and only 167 made in right-hand drive. What are you waiting for?

Simon de Burton

In the classifieds



2005 Roadster S Lux

£13,495 intermarque.co.uk

51,000 miles, black, black leather, full BMW service history, near-perfect example. Manchester



2004 Roadster S Lux

£10,500 autotrader.co.uk (private sale)

95,000 miles, black, black leather, satnav, parking sensors, full dealer and specialist history



2004 Roadster S Lux

Just sold munichlegends.co.uk

21,000 miles, Alpina Blue, black leather, satnav, xenons, rain sensors. East Sussex

Or consider...

BMW Z4 M Roadster

The 'M' version of this generation of Z4 arrived after the Alpina, in 2006. It has more power (338bhp), but is limited to 155mph and is less rare. Still good, though.

Mercedes-Benz SLK55 AMG

5.5-litre V8, 355bhp. The hairdresser's convertible becomes a hot-rod thanks to a big dose of AMG power.

Porsche Boxster S

Examples of Porsche's 306bhp mid-engined sports car from the same era as the Alpina are generally cheaper and more plentiful, but have comparable performance.

Market Watch

Knowledge

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Ask the expert

Your buying questions answered



I currently drive a 1991 Golf GTI 16v that has been an ongoing restoration project through my time at university. However, as I am soon to start a new job I have been thinking about buying an additional car as a daily driver, as the Golf's reliability is still a bit suspect. I want something fun and interesting, so I've been looking at the Honda Integra Type R, both DC2 and DC5 models, as well as the Mk5 Golf GTI. I was wondering what your suggestions would be for a budget of £4k-6k and whether there is another car I should consider?

Tom Middleton



The car that immediately stands out from your shortlist is the Type R DC2. As well as easily meeting your requirements for being 'fun' and 'interesting', it now seems pretty well established as a modern classic that is set

to maintain its value, whereas prices of the later DC5 don't seem quite so stable.

No doubt you are someone who enjoys feeling a connection with the car you're driving, so you'll appreciate the DC2's slightly more raw-edged feel over the DC5, too. The available budget will enable you to buy a really good DC2, so don't compromise. As this goes to press, Infinity Cars of Peterborough has a likely contender on offer at £5490, with full service history and in a good colour combination of white with red interior.

Since you seem to be a Golf fan, I would also suggest you consider a Mk4 R32 – perhaps surprisingly, these are now heading towards your price range. If you can bear to, you could even sell your GTI and put the money towards a Mk5 R32, although either of these will cost more to insure than an Integra DC2.

sdb

Email your question to experts@evo.co.uk

Just looking

The pick of the classifieds this month



Porsche Cayenne S

£11,995

Specialist Cars,
North Yorkshire

specialistcarsltd.co.uk
0844 7000 997

Sales figures might have you thinking that today Porsche is an SUV company that also happens to make sports cars. The car that kicked off this shift was, of course, the Range Rover-rivalling Cayenne.

The Cayenne appears to defy physics with its combination of sports handling and off-road capability. The original mid-range 'S' model came equipped with a 335bhp 4.5-litre V8, good to sprint the Porsche heavyweight to 60mph in 7.2sec and on to a 150mph top speed.

This 2003 car has covered 97,460 miles, but has an extensive service history and comes specced with air suspension, heated electric memory seats, satnav and Bose audio, and the interior's wrapped in desirable Havana leather too. That's a lot of car for the money.

Sam Sheehan (@evoSamSheehan)



Porsche 911 Carrera 4S Cabriolet

£39,950

Tom Hartley Jnr, Derbyshire
tomhartleyjnr.com

01283 761119

Porsche doesn't reserve the four-wheel-drive treatment for its SUVs, of course. The Carrera 4S is one of several 911s that sends power to all four corners, and with the prospect of the coldest winter on record fast approaching, this convertible 997 4S could be just the ticket for fully enjoying the crisp conditions with some added security and traction.

The 4S's 3.8-litre straight-six produces 350bhp in the first-gen 997, giving 0-62 in 4.9sec and a top speed of 179mph. And with minimal compromise compared to the fixed-top 911, the Cabriolet version remains a firm **evo** favourite.

This 2007 car has covered just 10,300 miles, making this an almost-new 911 for under £40k. It comes with satnav, Bose audio, and heated leather seats – which might well come in handy...

SS

Trader chat

Amari Supercars amarisupercars.com

Preston in Lancashire might not have much in common with the deserts of Arabia, but for almost 30 years it has been home to Amari Supercars, the eponymous business set up by Sheikh Amari back in the mid-1980s. Carrying an ever-changing stock of 50-60 cars, Amari currently has everything on its books from collector-grade classics such as a Lamborghini Miura P400S to a brace of year-old Ferrari 458s.

Head of sales, Ali Keyhani, who has been in the motor trade for 20 years, joined Amari only in June, but even in the relatively short



time since has seen values of certain cars increase significantly as the number of people choosing to buy for investment continues to grow.

'We try to keep a good combination of contemporary supercars, modern classics and historic models,' says Keyhani. 'It has been said before, but there is no doubt that more and more people are seeing the investment value in buying the right cars – not simply the potential to rise in value, but the fact that they don't attract capital gains tax and

that, unlike ISAs and other conventional investments, they are fun to own.

'Ferrari is undoubtedly the most popular marque for investors right now, with 355s really on the rise and 512TRs that were £40,000-60,000 last year now being £150,000. Like most dealers, our problem lies in getting the best cars to sell, but we are currently working with two or three really major owners who are refining their collections. That will help us to maintain the standard of stock we have become known for.'

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ENGINE UPGRADES AND REMAPPING

Air Filters, Induction Kits, Intercoolers, ECU Remaps, Bluefin, Dump Valves



SUSPENSION - SPRINGS, COILOVERS...

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Market Watch

Knowledge

Insights into the used-car market

Auction watch

Poster cars of the 1980s to headline RM Auction's Arizona sale in mid-January



WHAT BETTER WAY to start 2015 than with some rare and expensive supercars? RM Auctions' Arizona sale generally brings together a huge selection of interesting models, from pre-war classics to the latest hypercars, and this year's event, to be held on January 14-16, will offer more than 120.

Poster car to many young petrolheads in the 1990s (myself included), the Bugatti EB110 (pictured top) was legendary at the time for having not one, not two, but four turbochargers. Hooked up to the 3.5-litre V12, they resulted in a whopping 552bhp. That might not sound quite so impressive today, but with a top speed of 212mph, the EB110 is still one of the fastest cars ever built.

It's unusual to find an EB110 in the States. This example being offered by RM Auctions was originally owned by a Japanese collector, after which it was imported into the US. It's painted in the model's most iconic colour, French Racing Blue, and as one of just 139 EB110s built, it's significantly rarer than, for example, a Ferrari F40. It's expected to sell for \$575,000-775,000.

Despite being less rare than the EB110, there are a multitude of reasons why the F40 is so highly valued. RM has got a 5000-mile example (above left) in the same sale, which is expected to sell for \$1,150,000-1,350,000. The F40 is an altogether more raw driving experience than most of its contemporary rivals, and prices for low-mileage examples continue to strengthen.

Other notable lots include a slightly bizarre-looking US-homologated Lamborghini Countach 5000 QV (above right), featuring the huge front and rear bumpers that were needed to federalise the Gandini-styled supercar in the States. If you want to avoid those bumpers, there's always the Tahiti Blue 1979 Countach LP400S, estimated at \$800,000-1,000,000.

Another car with similar 1980s poster appeal is a highly original black Ferrari Testarossa (with original paint, interior and even tyres), which is estimated to sell for \$125,000-175,000.

Matthew Hayward (@evoMatthew)

Auction results



DVCA, October 16

1981 DeLorean DMC-12
£25,300
2001 Alfa Romeo Spider
£1980
1995 Bentley Continental R
£30,250
1967 Fiat 124 Sport Spider
£7920

Artcurial, November 2

1964 Aston Martin DB5
£931,000
1989 Ferrari F40
£853,120

1972 Lancia Fulvia 1.6 Sport Zagato

€39,336
1977 Ferrari 308 GTB fibreglass
€131,120
1992 Jaguar XJ220
€211,120
1992 Alfa Romeo Spider
€13,112
1985 Porsche 930 Turbo
€61,984
1991 Ferrari Testarossa
€95,360
1992 Porsche 964 RS
€252,704
2008 Ferrari 612 Scaglietti
€95,360

Barons, October 28

1974 Jensen Interceptor III
£40,000
1966 Ford Mustang
£15,000
1998 Jaguar XK8 Coupe
£4900
1996 Mercedes-Benz CL500
£1900
1985 Jaguar XJ-S TWR (pictured) £2300
1998 Jaguar XJ8 3.2 Sport
£2000
1990 Bentley Turbo R Red Label
£5500

Auction calendar

December 3
H&H
Droitwich Spa, UK
classic-auctions.com

December 7
Bonhams
Oxford, UK
bonhams.com

December 13
Matthewson's
Thornton-Le-Dale, UK
matthewsons.co.uk

December 16
Barons
Esher, UK
barons-auctions.com

January 10, 2015
Coys
Autosport International
coys.co.uk

January 31
Anglia Car Auctions
King's Lynn, UK
angliacarauctions.co.uk

February 3-45
RM Auctions
Paris, France
rmauctions.com

February 23
Barons
Esher, UK
barons-auctions.com

March 7
Historics at Brooklands
Weybridge, UK
historics.co.uk

Fantasy garage

Three classic gentleman's continent-crossers for a notional £270,000. All can be found amongst the classifieds at classicandperformancecar.com



Facel Vega HK500
£173,850

This example of the car once beloved of Hollywood stars combines a big Chrysler V8 with a manual 'box.



Alvis TC108
£63,800

Graber's gorgeous alloy bodywork made this Alvis one of the best-looking grand tourers of its era. Its 3-litre six is smooth and effortless.



Bentley S3
£31,680

Final 'S' series car before the Shadow-shaped T1 arrived is ideal for wafting to the Cote d'Azur – if you have a source of petrol at 1960s' prices...



David 1995 - 2012

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Carbon Fibre Driving Zone Clear Engine Bay Cover
Ceramic Brakes 7,000 miles 2009 **£144,990**



Lamborghini Murcielago LP 640 Roadster LHD
Titanium Hercules Alloys Yellow Brake Calipers
Lifting Gear 10,000 miles 2008 **£134,990**



Lamborghini Gallardo LP 560
Lifting Gear Reverse Camera Black Calisto
Alloys 3,000 miles 2011 **£116,990**



Lamborghini Gallardo V10 Spyder eGear
Black Calisto Alloys, LP 560 front, Branding pack,
Quattrata Stitching, 19,000 miles, 2007, **£78,990**



Lamborghini Diablo 6.0 VT Final Edition
Carbon Fibre Driving Zone, Carbon Fibre Inserts,
Carbon Fibre Engine Bay, 20,000 miles, 2000, **£164,990**



Lamborghini Diablo
VT Wheels, SE30 limited edition 24,000 miles
1996 **£139,990**



Lamborghini Murcielago VT Roadster
Colour SatNav Lifting Gear Egear 10,000 miles 2005
£124,990



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Lamborghini Gallardo V10 Spyder Manual
Colour SatNav, 20 Inch Alloys, Reverse Camera,
32,500 miles, 2006, **£66,990**



Lamborghini Murcielago LP 640 Roadster
Bicolour interior Ceramic Brakes Egear
10,000 miles 2008 **£149,990**



Lamborghini Gallardo LP 570 Edizione Tecnica
Ceramic Brakes Lifting Gear
21,000 miles 2013 **£134,990**



Lamborghini Murcielago VT Roadster
Colour SatNav Lifting Gear Egear, Tubi Sports
Exhaust 10,000 miles 2005 **£119,990**



Lamborghini Gallardo
Quattrata Stitching Full Electric Heated Seats
Reverse Camera 13,000 miles 2008 **£79,990**



Lamborghini Gallardo V10 Coupe LHD HIGH SPEC
Lifting Gear, Clear Engine Bay Cover, Yellow
Brake Calipers, 14,000 miles, 2005, **£59,990**

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Buying Guide

Knowledge

Your indispensable resource when buying used

Vauxhall Astra VXR 2005-2011

Overview



With 237bhp, the original Astra VXR was one of the hottest hatches of its day. Now one could be yours for as little as £5000

Words: Sam Sheehan

THE FIRST-GENERATION Astra VXR arrived in 2005, bringing a more muscular package to the Mk5 version of the popular hatchback. Designed to fight it out with the hottest hatches from VW, Ford and Renaultsport, the VXR's engine was based on the 2-litre unit found in some other Vauxhall models, but heavy fettling from Lotus saw power boosted to 237bhp.

Most of that added oomph came from uprated internals, including new Mahle forged pistons and new injectors, plus a new turbo. Durability was increased with the use of under-piston oil cooling. Lotus also removed 6kg of engine counterweights, allowing for faster responses and a more rev-happy character. Flat-out, the VXR could pass 60mph in 6.7sec according to our timing gear, and would go on all the way to 152mph.

Drive was sent to the front wheels through a six-speed manual gearbox, with ratios close enough to make the most of the 236lb ft on offer. With so much torque available, torque steer was sometimes an issue, but Vauxhall never gave the option of a limited-slip differential. An aftermarket LSD is therefore a popular modification.

The VXR's chassis set-up was quite different to that of its European equivalent, the Opel Astra OPC, with Lotus fine-tuning the settings for the UK. Compared to the 'warm' Astra SRI, the VXR sat 15mm lower on springs and dampers that were stiffer by 40 per cent at the front, 50 per cent at the rear. The power steering was also tailored for British roads.

The ventilated brake discs were a generous 321mm in diameter at the front, 278mm at the rear. The standard alloys were 18-inchers, while larger, heavier 19-inch wheels were less desirable for driving dynamics but undeniably the more visually pleasing option. Inside, the interior differed only slightly from the standard car's, but gained deeper seats with thicker bolsters, aluminium pedals, VXR badges and some fake-carbon trim.

With all this for a fiver under £19,000 when new, the Astra VXR gained a strong following, and that means there are plenty to choose from used today. What should you look for? Read on to find out...

Checkpoints

Engine and transmission

Mark Watts of Vauxhall specialist Courtenay Sport (courtenaysport.co.uk) says the VXR's turbocharged 2-litre lump is strong and reliable, but given that these cars are often driven hard, there are a few areas to check for issues.

Valve stem oil seals can lift and allow oil to leak into the cylinders, the telltale sign being puffs of smoke at start-up. Stem seals are easily replaced during cambelt changes (due every eight years/80,000 miles); the exhaust-side seals are the likely candidates.

Smoke can also be a sign of a turbo issue, so one of the first things to do once the engine is up to temperature is ensure that there's strong boost.

Regular oil changes are a must, with 5W-40 fully synthetic being the preferred choice.

The M32 gearbox can suffer from bearing issues due to poor lubrication from overheated 'box oil. Listen out for whines – which are most likely in fifth or sixth – and look for excessive movement in the gearstick when pulling away in first; there may also be gearstick movement on the overrun in fourth, fifth and sixth.

Clutches are strong, and flywheels should last longer than the car.

Suspension, steering, brakes

Springs and dampers are generally strong and durable, so high mileage shouldn't threaten these parts. Replacement dampers are fairly cheap, anyway. Bushes last well too, but stronger polyurethane replacements are also inexpensive.

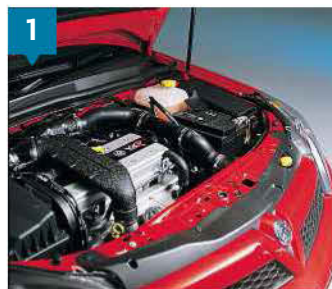
The brakes have few issues, with OEM-spec discs and pads providing strong stopping power without wearing at a particularly fast rate.

There's nothing to report with the steering, with any issues likely to have been caused by hitting kerbs on the road or jumping kerbs on trackdays.

Body, interior, electrics

Rust bubbles can appear under the paint where the zinc primer lifts, caused by salt ingress into stone chips, but it rarely develops into anything more serious. Sometimes rubbing between the front bumper and a wing, or the rear bumper and a rear quarter panel, can result in a small amount of surface corrosion. It's normally easily treated, however.

Inside, bolster wear is common on high-milers, but warning lights on the dash are a rare sight.



1: engine has a good reputation for reliability. 2: 19-inch wheels look great, but 18s give better handling. 3: check driver's seat for wear. 4: central exhaust cunningly rules out tow bars!



What we said



First drive, Sept 2005

'First impressions are dominated by the lusty engine, which delivers a hefty thump of easily accessible low-end torque that builds impressively through the mid-range. It pulls hard at the top end, too: a combination that delivers muscular performance in any gear.'

'The six-speed 'box has a slick, short throw and well-matched ratios, although unless the corner is especially tight you rarely need to drop below third. Such an abundance of urge has clearly tested the skills of Lotus and OPC's chassis engineers, for the rapid swell of torque must take some careful managing.'

'When our time comes to try the VXR on the Nürburgring, the combination of grip, progression and security comes into its own. Opel has provided a certain Smokin' Jo Winkelhock to lead us around, and his committed pace demands that you lean hard on the VXR's reserves of grip and composure just to keep up and save face. The high-speed sections in particular demonstrate the VXR's poise and forgiving nature when pushed to extremes. The Astra manages to carry terrific pace without once feeling twitchy or intimidating.' – *evo* 083



Above: VXR's chassis was tuned for UK roads, although we first tried it at the Nürburgring



Above: 237bhp put the VXR ahead of the Golf GTI, Mégane 225 and Focus ST on power

Specification

Vauxhall Astra VXR

Engine In-line 4-cyl, 1998cc, turbo
Max power 237bhp @ 5600rpm
Max torque 236lb ft @ 2400rpm
Transmission Six-speed manual, front-wheel drive
Weight 1393kg
Power-to-weight 173bhp/ton
0-60mph 6.7sec
Top speed 152mph (claimed)
Price new £18,995 (2005)

Parts prices

(Prices from York Ward & Rowlett, Wellingborough. Tyre price from blackcircles.com. All prices include VAT but exclude fitting charges)

Tyres (each) £100.39 (Continental ContiSportContact 2)
Front pads (axle set) £78.60
Front discs (pair) £181.20
Exhaust centre section £147.60
Exhaust rear section £402
Clutch slave cylinder £130.80
Clutch cover/disc £201.60
Spark plugs (set) £48.96

Servicing

(Prices from York Ward & Rowlett, Wellingborough, including VAT)

Service every 10,000 miles or 12 months, whichever is sooner.

Year 1 service £157.82
Year 2 service £223.86
Year 3 service £157.82
Year 4 service £316.20
Cambelt service £586.56

'I bought one' Dave Horam

'I bought my Astra VXR in May 2014. It's a 2006 car and had 45,000 miles on the clock. I've added a further 7000 since then, 5000 of those having been in one week! That was during a driving holiday in Spain and the car never missed a beat, despite me taking full advantage of the great driving roads.'

'To me the car is fantastic value for money as standard, though I have made a few modifications to make it

my ultimate fast-road toy. A Stage 3 upgrade has taken it to around 300bhp, which hasn't resulted in any running issues whatsoever. I've also fitted a big-brake kit to boost stopping power – I demand a lot from my brakes, and since this car is purely my weekend toy, it made sense to make the upgrade.'

'Because I love the way this car drives, the modifications I make from here on will all be to improve its fundamental

characteristics. I plan on removing the rear seats to make it lighter – the only passenger that enjoys the car with me is my son – and then I just plan to use and abuse it.'

'To really put things in perspective, my daily driver – a Mercedes C63 AMG – doesn't put any more of a smile on my face than the Astra. And considering how much the VXR costs to buy and run in comparison, it's just fantastic.'

In the classifieds



2008 (55) Astra VXR

⊕ 89,000 miles ⊕ Flame Red
 ⊕ 19in alloys
 ⊕ Recent cambelt change
 ⊕ autotrader.co.uk
 (private sale)

£5000



2007 (07) Astra VXR

⊕ 61,950 miles
 ⊕ Metallic Sapphire Black
 ⊕ 18in alloys
 ⊕ Excellent condition
 ⊕ lotusnewcastle.co.uk

£7999



2010 (10) Astra VXR

⊕ 20,000 miles
 ⊕ Metallic Sapphire Black
 ⊕ 19in alloys
 ⊕ RAC warranty
 ⊕ pearcars.co.uk

£12,499

The rivals

Ford Focus ST

Perhaps the VXR's most closely matched rival, but with a fabulous five-cylinder engine good for 222bhp. From £4500.

Renaultsport Mégane 225

Less power than the VXR (222bhp) but the most focused handling dynamics in its class. Yours for as little as £2500.

Volkswagen Golf GTI

The GTI made a long-overdue return to form with the Mk5. 197bhp proved plenty, and build quality tops that of its rivals. Early examples start around £4500.

What to pay

A well-looked-after early example with an average mileage – around 70k miles on an 06-plate car, say – can command less than £7000 from an approved dealer. Private sellers will undercut this, but take extra care with cars that fall significantly below this price; although there are some genuine bargains out there, cars with poor service histories should be avoided. Later cars can easily top £10,000, getting you low miles and/or a limited-edition Nürburgring Edition (complete with unique wheels, graphics and trim). We'd opt for cars fitted with the smaller 18-inch wheels, saving cash and improving handling.

Useful contacts

⊕ courtenaysport.co.uk (parts, tuning)
 ⊕ vxronline.co.uk (forums, events)
 ⊕ networkq.co.uk (approved used)
 ⊕ thorney.ms (tuning)
 ⊕ autotrader.co.uk (cars for sale)
 ⊕ classicandperformancecar.com (cars for sale)

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Sportviz XTS Sun Core

£49.95 sportviz.com

1 Going for a blast on a crisp winter's morning is one of motoring's greatest joys, but low sun and glare from the road surface can seriously impair vision. These XTS Sun Core polarised shades by Sportviz present a solution. Four frame and lens colour options are available, as is a patented 'Inzert' to the wearer's prescription.

ACCESSORY

935 K3 air freshener

£4.36 8380labs.myshopify.com

2 Air fresheners aren't just for taxis, particularly when they look as cool as this. Designed by 8380 Laboratories, it replicates the BBS 'turbfan' wheel of the late-'70s Porsche 935 K3 racers. AC Cobra and OZ DTM designs are also available.

MODEL

1:18 Autoart Aston Martin One-77

£172 diecastlegends.com

3 Some might say Aston Martin was unwise launching a million-pound supercar on the back of one of the deepest recessions of the past century, but the company still managed to sell every single one. Autoart's model is a lot lighter on the wallet but looks just as good sitting on your desk.

EXHAUST

QuickSilver Titan Sport for Lamborghini Huracán

£3860 quicksilverexhausts.com

4 In the past it might have been sacrilege to bolt aftermarket parts to supercars. Now it's virtually de rigueur and can really enhance the car in question. This QuickSilver system is a third of the weight of the standard Huracán exhaust and is claimed to offer improved throttle response and sound.

TIMING GEAR

VBOX LapTimer

£714 racelogic.co.uk

5 20Hz GPS data logger with a brilliantly addictive predictive lap timer display for instant feedback. Invaluable for racing and testing, it stores speed, splits and predicted times on an SD card for later analysis. Not cheap, but this is a high-quality billet aluminium device, plus the included software detects the circuit from a database of 500 tracks. Tried & Tested review soon...

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Knowledge

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1

SLOT CAR

Scalextric Bentley Continental GT3

£39.99 scalextric.com

1 This take on Bentley's GT3 racer is one of Scalextric's high-detail range. To that end, it has working headlights and tail lights – xenon-effect at the front – and can be easily converted for use with Scalextric Digital kit. Just try not to lose it under your sofa...

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

Toyota GT86 Experiences

From £149
silverstone.co.uk/experiences

2 Want to explore the handling capabilities of an *evo* favourite on a world-class circuit? Silverstone puts you behind the wheel of Toyota's GT86 for nine laps. The experience is split into two stints and takes around 2 hours and 15 minutes overall. Nissan GT-R and single-seater experiences are also available.



2

3



4

5

CAR CARE

Richbrook tailored car cover

From £99 richbrook.co.uk

3 Cold winter weather, road salt and frequent precipitation can really take their toll on your car, so better to store your summer toy under one of Richbrook's fitted car covers. They're made from breathable fabric, can be used indoors or outdoors and weigh only 2kg.

WATCH

Christopher Ward C11 Titanium Extreme 1000

£1150 christopherward.co.uk

4 You can't walk 50 feet at a motor show these days without bumping into a car boasting titanium somewhere in its construction, but watchmakers cottoned on to the strong, lightweight metal years ago. Christopher Ward's latest titanium timepiece is aimed at divers, but the industrial look gives it petrolhead appeal too.

BATTERY CHARGER

CTEK Lithium XS

£109.99 ctek.com

5 Some stripped-back cars, such as the Porsche 991 GT3 and Renaultsport Mégane Trophy-R, can be equipped with a lightweight lithium-ion battery, rather than a heavy lead-acid item. If you won't be driving a car thus equipped for a while, it's useful to keep it on a smart charger like this one from CTEK to ensure you're always ready to go.



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Knowledge

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PIONEER SPH-DA120 WITH APPLE CARPLAY

£349.99 halfords.com

Many of us can't live without our smartphones, so tech that makes their use easier on the go is welcome. Pioneer's SPH-DA120 double-DIN head unit employs Apple's CarPlay software to enable you to access your iPhone 5 or 6's popular apps on your car's dash. The unit is also compatible with Android phones.

Contacts, Messages, Maps, Music and other apps such as Spotify can be accessed through the tablet-like touchscreen, with familiar iOS-inspired menus and buttons ensuring learning time is essentially non-existent. More apps are expected in due course.

Certain areas have been optimised for the car, such as the removal of a typepad from Messages and album art from Music. Siri voice recognition takes the place of the letters, whilst larger skip and play

buttons make the Music app easier to use when you're on the go.

We had hoped the unit would be able to connect to our phone via Bluetooth, but given that signal strength is vital, the unit's requirement for a wired connection is understandable. It also means the SPH-DA120 doubles up as a phone charger.

Setting up Maps navigation is as simple as asking for navigation: Siri opens Maps and offers directions, though very clear pronunciation is required, as is often the case on iPhones. We hold hope for Google Maps to join the apps list.

The Apple CarPlay software essentially projects your phone's main apps onto the dash, rather than radicalising your car's infotainment system, but it makes life that little bit easier.

Sam Sheehan (@evoSamSheehan)



UNILITE PROSAFE PS-IL1 LED RECHARGEABLE INSPECTION LIGHT

£44.95 torchdirect.co.uk

As winter rolls in and darkness shortens the day, the hours available to work on cars are limited. One solution to this issue is Unilite's ultra-bright Prosafe PS-IL1 LED inspection light. Producing an eye-aching 250 lumens of light, it can illuminate objects as far away as 42 metres.

Weighing just 200g, this rechargeable light isn't any larger than your average torch, yet it comes equipped with a hanging hook, stand and magnet, and seems tough enough to withstand numerous workshop drops.

We put it to the test under the bonnets of our Fast Fleet vehicles and it proved easy to use and much more effective than a conventional torch. In fact it's so bright that when directed at an engine bay at night, we could see significantly more than when working in the same space in natural daylight.

The problem with really bright rechargeable lights is that they often require frequent recharging, but after an hour of constant use the PS-IL1 remained super bright and showed no signs of running out of battery. Unilite claims a three-hour continuous running time, and it takes five hours to recharge it from flat. To recharge, you have the choice of a 12V car charger or mains plug.

When it comes to working in dark spaces or getting a better look at those usually dimly lit areas under a bonnet, the Unilite Prosafe PS-IL1 makes for a very valuable tool.

Sam Sheehan (@evoSamSheehan)



XLR8 APP

Free (upgrades cost **£1.99**)

itunes.apple.com or play.google.com

If an American muscle car or Italian exotic is beyond your reach, you might imagine that experiencing their growls and screams during a midweek commute is unattainable. But now there is a way...

XLR8 (geddit?) is a free app for iOS and Android that allows you to artificially live your automotive dreams by playing a recording of a high-performance car's exhaust note through your car's speakers. Although this idea is nothing new – Renault offers a similar system in its current Clio, for example – this app allows anybody with a smartphone (or tablet) and a car stereo to plug it into to enjoy the thrum of an American V8 whilst commuting... in a VW Up.

Your phone's accelerometers sense when you're accelerating, braking and cornering, and the app responds with the appropriate sound effects. You can fine-tune the noises, altering gear ratios, shift points and burnout sounds, or you can simply control the engine in the app by hand in manual mode (although preferably not while you're driving).

The fun that you can have by pretending your Fiesta is a Firebird can pass the time during a dreary trip to the shops. However, beyond that it soon becomes tiresome. XLR8 is also offers little diversity in engine noises – if you'd like anything other than a '70s V8 you'll have to fork out £1.99 for the privilege.

So, while XLR8 is initially free and entertaining, the novelty will soon wear off. Unless you're 12.

Oliver Harry

ROAD CAR

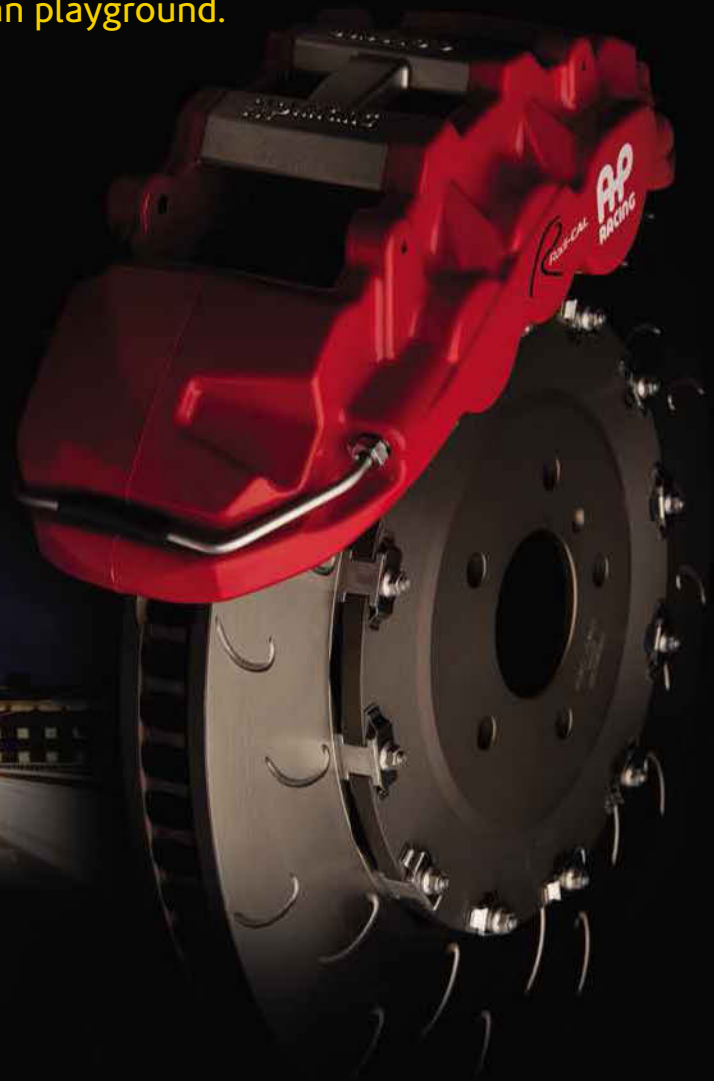
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Knowledge

The best destinations to visit in your car

Great drives: Palm Springs/Idyllwild

Start point: 33.672114, -116.409333, Pines to Palms Highway, Palm Desert, CA 92260
The roads: Highway 74 (Roy Wilson Memorial Highway, Pines to Palms Highway) and Highway 243 (Esperanza Firefighters Memorial Highway, Banning-Idyllwild Panoramic Highway)
Perfect for: Aston Martin V12 Vantage S, Chevrolet Corvette Stingray



N

NOW, I'LL BE totally honest, the good old US of A hadn't really set my pants (that's underwear, not trousers) on fire in terms of its driving roads – until I drove out of Palm Springs one sunny autumn morning...

The Roy Wilson Memorial Highway (otherwise known as Highway 74) heads south-southwest out of Palm Springs (or Palm Desert to be precise) and once you're past the last condo it begins climbing immediately. It probably only doubles back on itself about half a dozen times, but it feels like more and there are plenty of bends between the big hairpins. The road surface is surprisingly choppy but the lanes themselves are still a touch wider than anything you would find in Europe, which gives you confidence to push a little harder in the corners.

Once you've reached the top, parked up and taken a moment to marvel at the view of the road twisting through the almost Martian landscape below, you carry on along a plateau. It's more straights and sweepers up here but eventually you'll reach Paradise. You can tell by the sign above the café on the crossroads that says 'Paradise Café'. Turn left here and you can head off towards Borrego Springs, which has a good canyon road and a better mountain pass, but it's a bit of a hike. Alternatively you can simply continue along the 74 and then turn right on the 243 through Idyllwild and the San Jacinto Mountains. The views get more and more expansive and the road gets twistier until the final descent toward the Interstate (I-10), which is as good if not better than the original climb out of Palm Springs. Drive it at sunset for best effect.

From Banning, where the road ends, it's about an hour west to LA or 20 minutes east back to Palm Springs. If you're anything like me you'll spend that time wondering just how many other great roads America is hiding...

Henry Catchpole
Features editor



The route



Start **Finish**
 Distance: 61 miles Time: 1hr 25min

Where to stay

There are plenty of hotels to choose from in Palm Springs. The Hotel California (altogether now) gets incredible reviews. If you want to spend a bit more, the Colony Palms is very nice without being too big. If you stop in Idyllwild then go to Café Aroma on North Circle Drive and have some cake – you won't regret it.

Watch out for

Idyllwild sits at 1650m, so although you start out in the desert, there can easily be snow up in the higher parts of this drive. There is also the possibility of forest fires in the summer so heed any warning signs. While we didn't see many police cars when we visited (evo 189), the roads are not so remote as to be devoid of them, so just bear that in mind on the oh-so-tempting long straights...

For more driving destinations, visit:
evo.co.uk/track-and-travel

Reader road trip

Magical history tour

And the day came. It was time for a trip dedicated to the most significant spots in automotive history in Europe. So, after leaving home on the shores of Lake Maggiore, Italy, and crossing Switzerland and enjoying its alpine panoramas, the first stop was the Mercedes-Benz Museum in Stuttgart. It's a lovely place, emanating history. The galleries showing the race cars, old and new, are absolutely breathtaking.

The following day I visited the Porsche Museum (pictured) in the same city. It's packed with the finest cars you can imagine and it's unbelievable to find them all under one roof. Then, after a few hours' drive northwest, came the time for the trip's highlight: a couple



of laps of the Nürburgring Nordschleife. I knew it would be good, but it ended up being an experience beyond my expectations.

Two more things to do before coming home: attending the WEC 6 Hours of Spa in Belgium (yes, Eau Rouge live is stunning!) and visiting the Mulhouse Museum in France, where you can see motor legends from any place and age.

After five days and 1500 miles, I came home with my Scirocco, delighted and happy thanks to the beauty and inspiration cars give us, from a racetrack to a museum, through brilliant drives in magic places.

Alberto Valtorta, Italy

Email your story to henryc@evo.co.uk

PROMOTION

Michelin tyre recommendation

Few cars born in the USA are as iconic as the Corvette and it's our choice for the Palm Springs journey. Now in its seventh generation, the 2014 Corvette comes with an intoxicating 6.2-litre V8 delivering 460bhp. A tyre developed from endurance racing (Michelin are long-time suppliers to Le Mans teams, including Corvette Racing) has also been specifically 'tuned' for the Corvette Stingray: the Michelin Pilot Super Sport ZP (Zero Pressure). Its asymmetric design features larger outer tread blocks for cornering while the notched centre ribs and inner shoulder promote high-speed performance in dry conditions. Thanks to Michelin's new Zero Pressure Technology, the tyre's sidewalls are supple when inflated, but also sufficiently strong to temporarily carry the weight of the vehicle in the event of a puncture. On these mountain roads, it's reassuring to know high performance can also be a practical choice.

Database

Key ■ = new entry this month. * = grey import. Entries in italics are for cars no longer on sale. **Issue no.** is for our most recent major test of the car (D = Driven, R = Road test or group test, F = Feature). Call 0844 844 0039 to order a back issue. **Price** is on-the-road including VAT and delivery charges. **Engine** is the car's main motor only – additional hybrid tech isn't shown. **Weight** is the car's kerb weight as quoted by the manufacturer. **bhp/ton** is the power-to-weight ratio based on manufacturer's kerb weight. **0-60mph** and **0-100mph** figures in bold are independently recorded, all other performance figures are manufacturers' claims. **CO2 g/km** is the official EC figure and **EC mpg** is the official 'Combined' figure or equivalent.

Knowledge

Superminis / Hot Hatches

	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
Abarth Punto Supersport		£17,805	4/1368	178/5750	199/2750	1225kg	148	7.5	-	134	142	46.3	+ Attractive and fun - Needs more power	★★★★☆
Abarth 595 Competizione	196 D	£18,960	4/1368	158/5500	170/3000	1035kg	155	7.4	-	130	155	43.5	+ Spirited engine, still looks great - Favours fun over finesse	★★★★☆
Alfa Romeo Mito Cloverleaf	149 R	£18,870	4/1368	168/5500	184/2500	1145kg	149	7.5	-	136	139	47.1	+ Great MultiAir engine, impressive ride - Not as feisty as we hoped	★★★★☆
Alfa Romeo Giulietta QV	199 D	£28,120	4/1742	237/5750	251/2000	1320kg	182	6.0	-	151	162	40.3	+ Still looks good, and now it's got the 4C's engine - Pricey, and it has more rewarding rivals	★★★★☆
Alfa Romeo Giulietta Cloverleaf	144 D	10-14	4/1742	232/5500	251/1900	1320kg	179	6.8	-	150	177	37.2	+ Shows signs of deep talent... - ...but should be more exciting	★★★★☆
Alfa Romeo 147 GTA	187 R	03-06	6/3179	247/6200	221/4800	1360kg	185	6.0	15.5	153	-	23.3	+ Mk1 Focus RS pace without the histrionics - Slightly nose-heavy	★★★★☆
Audi S1	203 R	£24,900	4/1984	228/6000	273/1600	1315kg	176	5.8	-	155	162	40.4	+ Compliant and engaging chassis; quick, too - Looks dull without options	★★★★☆
Audi A1 quattro	181 R	13	4/1984	253/6000	258/2500	1420kg	181	5.7	-	152	199	32.8	+ Polished 253bhp all-wheel-drive A1 - Just 19 for UK, Porsche Cayman price	★★★★☆
Audi S3	188 R	£30,640	4/1984	296/5500	280/1800	1395kg	216	5.4	12.5	155	162	40.4	+ Lots of grip and one of the best-sounding four-pot turbos - Still a little too clinical	★★★★☆
Audi S3	106 R	06-12	4/1984	261/6000	258/2500	1455kg	183	5.6	13.6	155	198	33.2	+ Very fast, very effective, very... err, quality - A little too clinical	★★★★☆
Audi RS3 Sportback	156 R	11-12	5/2480	335/5400	332/1600	1575kg	216	4.5	-	155	212	31.0	+ Above, with added five-pot character - Again, see above...	★★★★☆
BMW 125i M Sport	176 D	£26,020	4/1997	218/5000	228/1350	1420kg	156	6.4	-	155	154	42.8	+ Performance, price, running costs - Dull four-pot soundtrack	★★★★☆
BMW M135i	195 R	£30,835	6/2979	316/5800	332/1300	1425kg	225	4.8	12.9	155	188	35.3	+ Powertrain, noise, chassis, price - M235i looks nicer, and has an LSD on its options list	★★★★☆
BMW 130i M Sport	106 R	05-10	6/2996	261/6650	232/2750	1450kg	183	6.1	15.3	155	-	34.0	+ Fantastic engine - Suspension can still get a little boingy	★★★★☆
Citroën C1/Peugeot 107/Toyota Aygo	126 R	£8095+	3/998	68/6000	68/3600	790kg	87	14.2	-	98	103	61.4	+ Full of character and insurance-friendly - Insurance friendly power	★★★★☆
Citroën Saxo VTS	020 R	97-03	4/1587	120/6600	107/5200	935kg	130	7.6	22.6	127	-	34.9	+ Chunky, chuckable charger - Can catch out the unwary	★★★★☆
Citroën AX GT	195 R	87-92	4/1360	85/6400	86/4000	722kg	120	9.2	-	110	-	-	+ Makes terrific use of 85bhp - Feels like it's made from paper	★★★★☆
Citroën DS3 1.6 THP	142 R	£17,475	4/1598	154/6000	171/1400	1240kg	126	7.2	-	133	155	42.2	+ A proper French hot hatch - Petrolheads might find it too 'designed'	★★★★☆
Citroën DS3 Racing	153 D	11-12	4/1598	204/6000	203/2000	1240kg	167	6.5	-	146	149	-	+ Faster, feistier version of above - Not as hardcore as its 'Racing' tag suggests	★★★★☆
Fiat Panda 100HP	132 R	06-11	4/1368	99/6000	97/4250	975kg	103	9.5	-	115	154	43.5	+ Most fun per pound on the market - Optional ESP can't be turned off	★★★★☆
Fiat Punto Evo Sporting	141 D	£13,355	4/1368	133/5000	152/1750	1155kg	117	8.5	-	127	129	50.4	+ Great engine, smart styling - Dynamics don't live up to the Evo name	★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta ST	196 D	£17,250	4/1596	179/5700	214/1500	1088kg	167	7.4	18.4	137	138	47.9	+ Chassis, price, punchy performance - Not as powerful as key rivals	★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta ST Mountune	195 R	£17,894	4/1596	212/6000	236/2750	1088kg	198	6.6	-	140	138	-	+ One of the best mid-sized hatches made even better - Badge snobbery	★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta Zetec S	123 D	08-13	4/1596	118/6000	112/4050	1045kg	115	9.9	-	120	134	48.7	+ Genuinely entertaining supermini - Grown up compared to Twingo/Swift	★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta Zetec S Mountune	132 R	08-13	4/1596	138/6750	125/4250	1080kg	130	7.9	-	120	134	48.7	+ As above, with a fantastically loud exhaust... - ...if you're 12 years old	★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta ST	075 D	05-08	4/1999	148/6000	140/4500	1137kg	132	7.9	-	129	-	38.2	+ Great looks, decent brakes - Disappointing chassis, gutless engine	★★★★☆
Ford Fiesta ST185 Mountune	115 R	08	4/1999	185/6700	147/3500	1137kg	165	6.9	-	129	-	-	+ Fiesta ST gets the power it always needed - OTT exhaust note	★★★★☆
Ford Focus 1.6T Zetec S	165 D	£20,595	4/1596	179/5700	199/1900	1333kg	136	7.8	-	138	139	47.1	+ The fastest, keenest Mk3 Focus yet - The Mk1's sparkle is still absent, though	★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST	188 R	£21,995	4/1999	247/5500	265/1750	1362kg	184	6.5	16.8	154	169	-	+ All-round cracking hot hatch. Good value, too - There's a bit of torque-steer	★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST Mountune	187 D	£23,220	4/1999	271/5500	295/1750	1362kg	202	5.7	-	154+	169	-	+ Great value upgrade - Steering still not as feelsome as that of some rivals	★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST	119 R	05-10	5/2522	222/6000	236/1600	1392kg	162	6.7	16.8	150	224	30.4	+ Value, performance, integrity - Big engine compromises handling	★★★★☆
Ford Focus ST Mountune	137 R	08-11	5/2522	256/5500	295/2500	1392kg	187	5.8	14.3	155	224	-	+ ST takes extra power in its stride - You probably still want an RS	★★★★☆
Ford Focus RS (Mk2)	195 R	09-11	5/2522	300/6500	324/2300	1467kg	208	5.9	14.2	163	225	30.5	+ Huge performance, highly capable FWD chassis - Body control is occasionally clumsy	★★★★☆
Ford Focus RS500	181 R	10-11	5/2522	345/6000	339/2500	1467kg	239	5.6	12.7	165	225	-	+ More power and presence than regular RS - Pricey	★★★★☆
Ford Focus RS (Mk1)	195 R	02-03	4/1998	212/5500	229/3500	1278kg	169	5.9	14.9	144	-	-	+ Some are great - Some are awful (so make sure you drive plenty)	★★★★☆
Ford Escort RS Cosworth	157 R	92-96	4/1993	224/6250	224/3500	1275kg	179	6.2	-	137	-	-	+ The ultimate Essex hot hatch - Unmodified ones are rare, and getting pricey...	★★★★☆
Ford Puma 1.7	095 R	97-02	4/1679	123/6300	116/4500	1041kg	120	8.6	27.6	122	-	38.2	+ Everything - Nothing. The 1.4 is worth a look too	★★★★☆
Ford Racing Puma	128 R	00-01	4/1679	153/7000	119/4500	1174kg	132	7.8	23.2	137	-	34.7	+ Exclusivity - The standard Puma does it so well	★★★★☆
Honda Civic Type R	102 R	07-11	4/1998	198/7800	142/5600	1267kg	158	6.8	17.5	146	215	31.0	+ Looks great, VTEC more accessible - Steering lacks feel, inert balance	★★★★☆
Honda Civic Type R Champ'ship White	126 D	09-10	4/1998	198/7800	142/5600	1267kg	158	6.6	-	146	-	31.0	+ Limited-slip diff a welcome addition - It's not available on standard car...	★★★★☆
Honda Civic Type R Mugen	195 R	09-11	4/1998	237/8300	157/6250	1233kg	195	5.9	-	155	-	-	+ Fantastic on road and track - There's only 20, and they're a tad pricey...	★★★★☆
Honda Civic Type R	075 R	01-05	4/1998	197/7400	145/5900	1204kg	166	6.8	16.9	146	-	31.7	+ Potent and great value - Looks divide opinion, duff steering	★★★★☆
Kia Proceed GT	186 D	£19,995	4/1591	201/6000	195/1750	1448kg	143	7.4	-	143	171	38.2	+ Good chassis, appealing price - Thrashy engine	★★★★☆
Lancia Delta Integrale	194 R	88-93	4/1995	207/5750	220/3500	1300kg	162	5.7	-	137	-	23.9	+ One of the finest cars ever built - Demands love, LHD only	★★★★☆
Mazda 2.1 S Sport	132 R	£13,495	4/1498	102/6000	101/4000	1030kg	107	10.4	-	117	135	48.7	+ Fun and funky - Feels tinny after a Mini	★★★★☆
Mazda 3 MPS	137 R	06-13	4/2261	256/5500	280/3000	1385kg	188	6.3	14.5	155	224	29.4	+ Quick, eager and very good value - The steering's iffy	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz A250 'by AMG'	173 D	£29,355	4/1991	208/5500	258/1200	1370kg	154	6.5	-	149	148	46.3	+ Mercedes builds a proper hot hatch - But denies it a manual gearbox	★★★★☆
Mercedes-Benz A45 AMG	194 R	£37,845	4/1991	355/6000	332/2250	1480kg	244	4.3	10.6	155	161	40.9	+ Blisteringly quick everywhere - Not as rewarding as some slower rivals	★★★★☆
MG3 Style	190 D	£9999	4/1498	104/6000	101/4750	1155kg	91	10.4	-	108	136	48.7	+ Decent chassis, performance and price - Thrashy engine, cheap cabin	★★★★☆
MG Metro 6R4 Clubman	181 R	84-87	6/2991	250/7000	225/6500	1000kg	254	4.5	-	140	-	-	+ The most extreme hot hatch ever - Engine noise, heat soak, five mpg	★★★★☆
Mini Cooper (F56)	194 D	£15,300	4/1499	134/4500	162/1250	1085kg	125	7.9	-	130	105	62.8	+ Punchy three-cylinder engine, good chassis - Tubby styling	★★★★☆
Mini Cooper S (F56)	196 D	£18,665	4/1998	189/4700	206/1250	1160kg	166	6.8	-	146	133	49.6	+ Still has that Mini DNA - Expensive with options; naff dash displays	★★★★☆
Mini John Cooper Works Coupe (R58)	164 R	£23,805	4/1598	208/6000	206/2000	1175kg	180	6.3	-	149	165	39.8	+ The usual raucous Mini JCW experience - But with a questionable 'helmet' roof...	★★★★☆
Mini Cooper (R56)	185 F	09-14	4/1598	120/6000	118/4250	1075kg	113	9.1	-	126	127	52.3	+ Brilliant ride and composure; could be all the Mini you need - You'll still buy the 'S'	★★★★☆
Mini Cooper S (R56)	149 R	06-14	4/1598	181/5500	177/1600	1140kg	161	7.0	-	142	136	48.7	+ New engine, Mini quality - Front end not quite as direct as the old car's	★★★★☆
Mini Cooper SD (R56)	158 D	11-14	4/1995	141/4000	225/1750	1150kg	125	8.0	-	134	114	65.7	+ A quick diesel Mini with impressive mpg - But no Cooper S alternative	★★★★☆
Mini John Cooper Works (R56)	184 R	08-14	4/1598	208/6000	206/2000	1160kg	182	7.2	16.7	148	165	39.8	+ A seriously rapid Mini - Occasionally just a little unruly	★★★★☆
Mini John Cooper Works GP (R56)	195 R	13-14	4/1598	215/6000	206/2000	1160kg	188	6.3	-	150	165	39.8	+ Brazenly hyperactive - Too much for some roads and some tastes	★★★★☆
Mini Cooper S (R50)	077 R	02-06	4/1598	168/6000	155/4000	1140kg	143	7.8	19.9	135	-	33.6	+ Strong performance, quality feel - Over-long gearing	★★★★☆
Mini Cooper S Works GP (R50)	144 R	06	4/1598	215/7100	184/4600	1090kg	200	6.5	-	149	-	32.8	+ Storming engine, agility - Tacky styling 'enhancements'	★★★★☆
Mitsubishi Colt Ralliart	132 R	08-13	4/1468	147/6000	155/3500	1060kg	141	7.4	-	131	161	40.9	+ Price, handling, performance - Its looks are a little odd	★★★★☆
Nissan Juke Nismo	184 R	£20,495	4/1618	197/6000	184/2400	1306kg	153	7.7	19.5	134	159	40.9	+ More than the sum of its parts - Not enough to add up to a pukka hot hatch	★★★★☆
Nissan Sunny GTi-R		92-93	4/1998	220/6400	197/4800	1269kg	176	6.1	-	134	-	25.1	+ Nissan's Escort Cossie - Make sure it's a good one	★★★★☆





Our Choice

Volkswagen Golf R. A flagship Golf to get really excited about, the new R offers immense pace and a truly engaging driving experience in a compromise-free package with class and quality aplenty. Cake both possessed and consumed.



Best of the Rest

BMW's M135i is an enticing rear-drive alternative to the Golf R, although the Mégane 265/275 pips both for absolute tautility and involvement. The Fiesta ST (left), meanwhile, is the default affordable hot hatch choice. We'd have ours Mounted.

Superminis / Hot Hatches

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	EVO rating
Peugeot 106 Rallye (Series 2)			4/1587	103/6200	97/3500	865kg	121	8.8	-	121	-	34.0	★★★★★
Peugeot 106 Rallye (Series 1)	095 R	'94-'96	4/1294	100/7200	80/5400	826kg	123	9.3	-	118	-	35.6	★★★★★
Peugeot 106 GTI 16v	034 R	'97-'04	4/1587	120/6600	107/5200	950kg	128	7.4	22.2	127	-	34.9	★★★★★
Peugeot 206 GTI	184 R	'18-'95	4/1598	197/5800	203/1700	1160kg	173	6.8	17.9	143	139	47.9	★★★★★
Peugeot 205 GTI 1.9	195 R	'88-'91	4/1905	130/6000	119/4750	910kg	145	7.9	-	124	-	36.7	★★★★★
Peugeot 306 GTI-6	020 R	'93-'01	4/1998	167/6500	142/5500	1215kg	139	7.2	20.1	140	-	30.1	★★★★★
Peugeot 306 Rallye	095 R	'98-'99	4/1998	167/6500	142/5500	1199kg	142	6.9	19.2	137	-	30.1	★★★★★
Renaultsport Twingo 133	175 R	'08-'13	4/1598	131/6750	118/4400	1050kg	127	8.6	-	125	150	43.5	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 200 Turbo	184 R	'18-'95	4/1618	197/6000	177/1750	1204kg	166	6.9	17.9	143	144	44.8	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 200 Cup	195 R	'09-'13	4/1998	197/7100	159/5400	1204kg	166	6.6	16.7	141	190	34.5	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 197 Cup	115 R	'07-'09	4/1998	194/7250	158/5550	1240kg	161	6.9	-	134	-	33.6	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 182	066 R	'04-'06	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1110kg	165	6.6	17.5	139	-	34.9	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 182 Cup	187 R	'04-'06	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1090kg	168	6.5	-	139	-	34.9	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio Trophy	200 R	'05-'06	4/1998	180/6500	148/5250	1090kg	168	6.6	17.3	140	-	34.9	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio 172 Cup	048 R	'02-'04	4/1998	170/6250	147/5400	1011kg	171	6.5	17.7	138	-	-	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio V6 255	057 R	'03-'05	6/2946	251/7150	221/4650	1400kg	182	5.8	-	153	-	23.0	★★★★★
Renaultsport Clio V6	029 R	'99-'02	6/2946	227/6000	221/3750	1335kg	173	5.8	17.0	145	-	23.0	★★★★★
Renault Clio Williams	195 R	'93-'96	4/1988	148/6100	126/5400	981kg	153	7.6	20.8	121	-	26.0	★★★★★
Renault 5 GT Turbo	195 R	'87-'91	4/1397	118/5750	122/3000	855kg	140	7.3	-	120	-	28.4	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 265 Cup	195 R	'25-'99	4/1998	261/5500	265/3000	1387kg	191	6.4	14.8	158	174	37.7	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 275 Trophy	201 D	'28-'93	4/1998	271/5500	265/3000	1376kg	200	6.0	-	158	174	37.7	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 275 Trophy-R	203 R	'36-'43	4/1998	271/5500	265/3000	1297kg	212	5.8	-	158	174	37.7	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 250 Cup	139 R	'09-'12	4/1998	247/5500	251/3000	1387kg	181	6.1	14.6	156	190	34.4	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane dCi 175 Cup	119 R	'07-'09	4/1995	173/3750	265/2000	1470kg	119	8.3	23.5	137	-	43.5	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane 230 F1 Team R26	195 R	'07-'09	4/1998	227/5500	229/3000	1345kg	171	6.2	16.0	147	-	-	★★★★★
Renaultsport Mégane R26.R	200 R	'08-'09	4/1998	227/5500	229/3000	1220kg	189	5.8	15.1	147	-	-	★★★★★
SEAT Ibiza FR 2.0 TDI	144 R	'17-'45	4/1968	141/4200	236/1750	1245kg	115	8.2	-	131	123	60.1	★★★★★
SEAT Ibiza Cupra	183 D	'18-'76	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1259kg	144	6.9	-	142	139	47.9	★★★★★
SEAT Leon FR TDI 184	184 D	'22-'25	4/1968	181/4000	280/1750	1350kg	136	7.5	-	142	112	64.2	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra 280	195 R	'26-'94	4/1984	216/6000	258/1750	1320kg	212	5.8	-	155	149	44.1	★★★★★
SEAT Leon FR+	163 D	'11-'12	4/1984	208/5300	206/1700	1334kg	158	7.2	-	145	170	38.7	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra R	139 R	'10-'12	4/1984	261/6000	258/2500	1375kg	193	6.1	14.0	155	190	34.9	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra	105 R	'07-'11	4/1984	237/5700	221/2200	1375kg	175	6.3	-	153	190	34.0	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra 20v T	020 R	'00-'06	4/1781	178/5500	173/5000	1322kg	137	7.7	-	142	-	33.2	★★★★★
SEAT Leon Cupra R 225	067 R	'03-'06	4/1781	222/5900	206/2200	1376kg	164	6.9	-	150	-	32.1	★★★★★
Skoda Fabia vRS (Mk2)	146 D	'17-'50	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1218kg	148	7.3	-	139	148	45.6	★★★★★
Skoda Fabia vRS (Mk1)	077 R	'04-'07	4/1896	130/4400	229/1900	1315kg	100	9.6	-	127	-	55.4	★★★★★
Skoda Octavia vRS (Mk3)	187 D	'23-'26	4/1984	211/4500	258/1500	1350kg	163	6.8	-	154	142	45.6	★★★★★
Skoda Octavia vRS (Mk2)	163 R	'06-'13	4/1998	197/5100	206/1700	1395kg	143	7.3	-	149	175	37.7	★★★★★
Smart Fortwo Brabus	110 D	'15-'37	3/999	97/5500	104/3500	780kg	126	9.9	-	96	119	54.3	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza STi CS400	146 R	'10-'12	4/2457	395/5750	400/3950	1505kg	267	4.6	10.7	155	-	-	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza WRX	125 D	'08-'10	4/2457	251/5400	288/3000	1395kg	180	5.5	-	130	270	-	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza STi 330S	124 R	'08-'10	4/2457	325/5400	347/3400	1505kg	219	4.4	-	155	-	-	★★★★★
Suzuki Swift Sport (Mk2)	175 R	'13-'49	4/1586	134/6900	118/4400	1045kg	130	8.7	-	121	147	44.1	★★★★★
Suzuki Swift Sport	132 R	'05-'11	4/1586	123/6800	109/4800	1030kg	121	8.9	-	124	165	39.8	★★★★★
Vauxhall Corsa VXR	154 R	'18-'95	4/1598	189/5850	192/1980	1166kg	165	6.8	-	140	172	38.7	★★★★★
Vauxhall Corsa VXR Nürburgring	164 R	'11-'13	4/1598	202/5750	206/2250	1166kg	176	6.5	-	145	178	-	★★★★★
Vauxhall Astra VXR (Mk2)	195 R	'27-'26	4/1998	276/5500	295/2500	1475kg	190	5.9	-	155	189	-	★★★★★
Vauxhall Astra VXR (Mk1)	102 R	'05-'11	4/1998	237/5600	236/2400	1393kg	173	6.7	16.7	152	221	30.7	★★★★★
VW Up/SEAT Mii/Skoda Citigo	171 R	'79-'90+	3/999	59/5000	70/3000	854kg	70	14.1	-	99	105	62.8	★★★★★
VW Polo GTI	154 R	'19-'73	4/1390	178/6200	184/2000	1184kg	153	6.8	-	142	139	47.9	★★★★★
VW Golf GTD (Mk7)	200 D	'25-'76	4/1968	181/3500	280/1750	1377kg	134	7.5	-	143	109	67.3	★★★★★
VW Golf GTI (Mk7)	195 R	'26-'125	4/1984	217/4500	258/1500	1351kg	163	6.5	-	152	138	47.1	★★★★★
VW Golf GTI (Mk7)	202 D	'28-'00	4/1395	201	258	1524kg	134	7.6	-	138	35	188.0	★★★★★
VW Golf GTI (Mk7)	203 R	'29-'90	4/1984	297/5500	280/1800	1476kg	204	5.1	-	155	165	40.9	★★★★★
VW Golf GTI (Mk6)	172 R	'09-'13	4/1984	207/5300	207/1700	1318kg	160	6.4	16.5	148	170	38.7	★★★★★
VW Golf R (Mk6)	140 D	'10-'13	4/1984	266/6000	258/2500	1521kg	178	5.5	-	155	199	33.2	★★★★★
VW Golf GTI (Mk5)	195 R	'04-'09	4/1984	197/5100	207/1800	1336kg	150	6.7	17.9	145	-	-	★★★★★
VW Golf R32 (Mk5)	087 R	'06-'09	6/3189	246/6300	236/2500	1510kg	165	5.8	15.2	155	-	26.4	★★★★★
VW Golf R32 (Mk4)	053 R	'02-'04	6/3189	237/6250	236/2800	1477kg	163	6.4	16.3	154	-	24.6	★★★★★
VW Golf GTI 16v (Mk2)	195 R	'88-'92	4/1781	139/6100	124/4600	960kg	147	7.9	-	129	-	26.6	★★★★★
VW Golf GTI (Mk1, 1.8)	095 R	'82-'84	4/1781	112/5800	109/3500	840kg	135	8.1	-	112	-	36.0	★★★★★
Volvo C30 T5 R-Design	122 R	'08-'12	5/2521	227/5000	236/1500	1347kg	165	6.6	16.9	149	203	32.5	★★★★★

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Excess mileage charge	14.9p per mile



Official fuel consumption for the Volvo V40 T2 R-Design (manual) in MPG (l/100km): Urban 41.5 (6.8), Extra Urban 62.8 (4.5), Combined 53.3 (5.3). CO₂ Emissions 124g/km. MPG figures are obtained from laboratory testing intended for comparisons between vehicles and may not reflect real driving results. Finance subject to status. Retail sales only. *Subject to availability at participating dealers only on vehicles registered by 31st December 2014. At the end of the agreement there are 3 options: (i) Renew: Part exchange the vehicle, (ii) Retain: Pay the Optional Final Payment to own the vehicle or (iii) Return the vehicle. Further charges may be made subject to the condition or mileage of the vehicle. Terms and conditions apply. Applicants must be 18 or over. Guarantee/Indemnity may be required. Volvo Car Credit RHI 1SR. You will not own the vehicle until all payments are made.

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Our Choice

BMW M5. The turbocharging of BMW's M-cars met with scepticism, but the current M5's 4.4-litre twin-turbo V8 feels a perfect fit. It's a brutally fast car, and there are clever (and useable) adjustable driving modes. It looks cool, too. The best big saloon is now even better.



Best of the Rest

Mercedes' C63 AMG is superb as either saloon or estate, Jaguar's showy XFR-S (left) has a particularly impressive chassis, and BMW's new M3 is an appealing all-round package. Meanwhile, the latest Alpina D3 Biturbo is not only the world's fastest diesel production car, but a great handler too.

Saloons / Estates / 4x4s

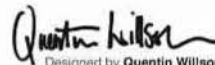
Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	EVO rating	
Alpina D3 Biturbo (F30)	192 D	£46,950	6/2993	345/4000	516/1500	1510kg	232	4.6	-	173	139	53.3	+173mph from a 3-litre diesel! Brilliant chassis, too - Auto only	★★★★★
Alpina B3 Biturbo (F30)	188 D	£54,950	6/2979	404/5500	442/3000	1535kg	267	4.2	-	190	177	37.2	+ Understated appearance, monster performance - E90 M3 is better on the limit	★★★★★
Alpina D3 (E90)	120 R	'08-12	4/1995	211/4000	332/2000	1495kg	143	6.9	-	152	-	52.3	+ Excellent chassis, turbodiesel oomph - Rather narrow powerband	★★★★★
Alpina B5 Biturbo	149 D	£75,150	8/4395	533/5200	538/2800	1845kg	293	4.5	-	198	244	26.9	+ Big performance and top-line luxury - Driver not really involved	★★★★★
Alpina B7 Biturbo	134 D	£98,800	8/4395	533/5200	538/2800	1965kg	276	4.6	-	194	230	28.5	+ Massive performance and top-line luxury - Feels its weight when hustled	★★★★★
Aston Martin Rapide S	201 D	£147,950	12/5935	552/6650	465/5500	1990kg	282	4.2	-	203	300	21.9	+ Oozes star quality; gearbox on 2015MY cars a big improvement - It's cosy in the back	★★★★★
Aston Martin Rapide	141 R	'10-13	12/5935	470/6000	443/5000	1990kg	240	5.2	-	188	355	-	+ Better than its DB9 sibling - More a 2+2 than a proper four-seater	★★★★★
Audi S3 Saloon	192 D	£33,240	4/1984	296/5500	280/1800	1430kg	210	5.3	-	155	162	26.4	+ On paper a match for the original S4 - In reality much less interesting	★★★★★
Audi S4 (B8)	166 D	£39,020	6/2995	328/5500	324/2900	1685kg	198	4.9	-	155	190	34.9	+ Great powertrain, secure chassis - The new RS4 is here now...	★★★★★
Audi S4 (B7)	073 D	'05-08	8/4163	339/7000	302/3500	1700kg	206	5.4	-	155	-	-	+ Effortless V8, agile handling - Lacks ultimate finesse of class leaders	★★★★★
Audi RS4 Avant (B8)	192 R	£56,525	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1795kg	251	4.5	10.5	174	249	26.4	+ Looks and sounds the part, thunderously fast - Harsh ride, unnatural steering	★★★★★
Audi RS4 (B7)	088 R	'06-08	8/4163	414/7800	317/5500	1650kg	255	4.5	10.9	155	-	-	+ 444bhp at 7800rpm! And there's an estate version too - Busy under braking	★★★★★
Audi RS4 (B5)	192 R	'00-02	6/2671	375/6100	325/2500	1620kg	236	4.8	12.1	170	-	17.0	+ Effortless pace - Not the last word in agility. Bends wheel rims	★★★★★
Audi RS2	101 R	'94-95	5/2226	315/6500	302/3000	1595kg	201	4.8	13.1	162	-	18.0	+ Storming performance (thanks to Porsche) - Try finding one	★★★★★
Audi S6	091 D	'06-11	10/5204	429/6800	398/3000	1910kg	228	5.2	-	155	299	22.4	+ Even faster, and discreet with it - Very muted V10	★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant (C7)	203 R	£77,005	8/3993	552/5700	516/1750	1935kg	290	3.6	8.2	155	229	28.8	+ Performance, foolproof powertrain, looks - Feels a bit one-dimensional	★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant (C6)	116 R	'08-10	10/4991	572/6250	479/1500	2025kg	287	4.3	9.7	155	333	20.2	+ The world's most powerful estate - Power isn't everything	★★★★★
Audi RS6 Avant (C5)	052 R	'02-04	8/4172	444/5700	413/1950	1865kg	242	4.8	11.6	155	-	19.3	+ The ultimate estate car? - Numb steering	★★★★★
Audi RS7	190 D	£83,495	8/3993	552/5700	516/1750	1920kg	292	3.9	-	155	229	28.8	+ Stonking performance, great looks - Numb driving experience	★★★★★
Audi S7	171 D	£62,330	8/3993	414/5000	406/1400	1945kg	216	4.6	-	155	225	-	+ Looks and drives better than S6 it's based on - Costs £8000 more	★★★★★
Audi S8	164 D	£79,900	8/3993	513/5800	479/1700	1975kg	264	4.1	-	155	237	27.7	+ Quicker and much more economical than before - But still overwhelming to drive	★★★★★
Audi RS Q3	194 R	£43,000	5/2480	306/5200	310/1500	1655kg	188	5.5	-	155	206	32.1	+ More enjoyable than many RS Audis - Used Cayennes and ML63s are similar money	★★★★★
Bentley Flying Spur V8	200 D	£142,800	8/3997	500/6000	487/1700	2342kg	217	4.9	-	183	254	25.9	+ Effortless performance with real top-end kick - Determinedly unsporting	★★★★★
Bentley Flying Spur	185 D	£153,300	12/5998	616/6000	590/1600	2400kg	261	4.3	-	200	343	19.0	+ More power than old Flying Spur Speed - Feels its weight; engine sounds dull	★★★★★
Bentley Continental Flying Spur Speed	141 R	'08-12	12/5998	600/6000	553/1750	2440kg	250	4.6	-	200	396	16.6	+ 600bhp; surprisingly fun handling - Could look a bit more like it goes	★★★★★
Bentley Mulsanne	178 F	£229,360	8/6752	505/4200	752/1750	2610kg	197	5.1	-	184	342	19.3	+ Drives like a modern Bentley should - Shame it doesn't look like one too	★★★★★
BMW 320d (F30)	168 R	£28,775	4/1995	181/4000	280/1750	1495kg	123	7.4	-	146	120	61.4	+ Fleet-friendly new Three is economical yet entertaining - It's a tad noisy	★★★★★
BMW 328i (F30)	165 D	£29,765	4/1997	242/5000	258/1250	1430kg	172	5.8	-	155	149	44.8	+ New-age four-pot 328i is great all-rounder - We miss the six-cylinder soundtrack	★★★★★
BMW 330d M Sport (F30)	180 D	£36,975	6/2993	254/4000	413/2000	1540kg	168	5.6	-	155	129	57.6	+ Great engine, fine handling, good value - Steering confuses weight with feel	★★★★★
BMW 435i Gran Coupe	203 D	£41,665	6/2979	302/5800	295/1200	1585kg	194	5.5	-	155	174	34.9	+ Superb straight-six, fine ride/handling balance - 335i saloon weighs and costs less	★★★★★
BMW M3 (F80)	203 R	£56,190	6/2979	425/5500	406/1850	1520kg	284	4.3	-	155	204	32.1	+ The looks, performance and practicality - Engine lacks the character an M-car deserves	★★★★★
BMW M3 (E90)	123 R	'08-11	8/3999	414/8300	295/3900	1605kg	262	4.9	10.7	165	290	22.8	+ Every bit as good as the E92 M3 coupe - No carbon roof	★★★★★
BMW M3 CRT (E90)	179 R	'11-12	8/4361	444/8300	334/3750	1580kg	285	4.4	-	180	295	-	+ Saloon chassis + weight savings + GTS engine = best E90 M3 - Just 67 were made	★★★★★
BMW 335i M Sport (E90)	134 R	'05-11	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1535kg	200	5.6	-	155	196	31.0	+ Stunning drivetrain, controlled chassis - Looks a bit steady	★★★★★
BMW 528i (F10)	164 D	£36,565	4/1997	242/5000	258/1250	1710kg	144	6.2	-	155	152	41.5	+ Four-pot 528i is downsizing near its best - You'll miss the straight-six sound effects	★★★★★
BMW 535i (F10)	141 D	£44,555	6/2979	302/5800	295/1200	1685kg	182	6.1	-	155	185	34.9	+ New 5-series impresses... - But only with all the chassis options ticked	★★★★★
BMW M5 (F10M)	165 R	£73,940	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1870kg	300	4.3	-	155	232	28.5	+ Twin-turbocharging suits all-new M5 well - Can feel heavy at times	★★★★★
BMW M5 Touring (E60)	105 R	'07-10	10/4999	500/7750	383/6100	1780kg	285	4.8	-	155	-	19.3	+ Brilliant at ten tenths - Feels slightly clumsy when pottering	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E60)	129 R	'04-10	10/4999	500/7750	384/6100	1755kg	289	4.7	10.4	155	-	19.6	+ Close to being the ultimate supersaloon - SMG gearbox feels old-tech	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E39)	110 R	'99-03	8/4941	394/6600	369/3800	1795kg	223	4.9	11.5	155	-	-	+ Magnificent V8-engined supersaloon - We'd be nit-picking	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E34)	110 R	'92-96	6/3795	340/6900	295/4750	1653kg	209	5.9	13.6	155	-	-	+ The Godfather of supersaloons - The family can come too	★★★★★
BMW M5 (E28)	182 R	'86-88	6/3453	282/6500	251/4500	1431kg	200	6.2	-	151	-	-	+ The original storming saloon - Understated looks	★★★★★
BMW M6 Gran Coupe	190 D	£98,125	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1875kg	299	4.2	-	155	232	28.5	+ Enormous performance, stylish looks - Price tag looks silly next to rivals, M5 included	★★★★★
BMW X5 M50d	191 D	£63,715	6/2993	376/4000	546/2000	2190kg	155	5.3	-	155	177	42.2	+ Straight-line pace - Driving experience identical to standard X5, despite the M badge	★★★★★
BMW X6 xDrive 50i	118 D	£58,880	8/4395	408/5500	442/1750	2190kg	186	5.4	-	155	292	22.6	+ Stunningly good to drive - Will you want to be seen arriving?	★★★★★
BMW X6M	134 D	£86,680	8/4395	547/6000	502/1500	2305kg	241	4.7	-	171	325	20.3	+ Fast, refined and comfortable - But it definitely lacks the M factor	★★★★★
BMW 750i	174 D	£71,505	8/4395	449/5500	480/2000	2020kg	226	4.7	-	155	199	-	+ Well specced, impressively refined - Lags far behind the Mercedes S-class	★★★★★
Brabus Bullit	119 R	£330,000	12/6233	720/5100	811/2100	1850kg	395	3.8	-	217	-	-	+ Seven hundred and twenty bhp - Three hundred thousand pounds	★★★★★
Cadillac CTS-V	148 R	£67,030	8/6162	556/6100	551/3800	1928kg	293	3.9	-	191	365	18.1	+ It'll stand out among M-cars and AMGs - But the novelty might wear off	★★★★★
Ford Mondeo ST220	043 D	'02-07	6/2967	223/6150	204/4900	1550kg	146	6.8	-	151	-	27.7	+ Muscular engine, fine chassis - Hotted-up repmobile image	★★★★★
Ford Sierra RS Cosworth 4x4	141 R	'90-93	4/1993	220/6250	214/3500	1305kg	159	6.6	-	144	-	24.4	+ Fast and furious - Try finding a straight one	★★★★★
Ford Sierra RS Cosworth	'86-90	4/1993	204/6000	204/4500	1220kg	169	6.2	-	143	-	-	-	+ Roadgoing Group A racer - Don't shout about the power output!	★★★★★
Honda Accord Type R	012 R	'99-03	4/2157	209/7200	158/6700	1306kg	163	6.1	17.4	142	-	29.4	+ One of the finest front-drivers of all time - Lack of image	★★★★★
Infiniti Q50S Hybrid	195 D	£40,000	6/3498	359/6800	402/5000	1750kg	208	5.1	-	155	144	45.6	+ Good powertrain, promising chassis - Lacklustre steering, strong rivals	★★★★★
Jaguar XF 3.0 V6 Diesel S	145 D	£46,610	6/2993	271/4000	443/2000	1695kg	162	5.9	-	155	159	47.1	+ Sweet handling plus diesel economy - But we'd still have the R	★★★★★
Jaguar XF Sportbrake 3.0 V6 Diesel S	177 D	£49,110	6/2993	271/4000	443/2000	1695kg	153	6.1	-	155	163	46.3	+ Looks and drives better than the saloon - There's now a Sportbrake R...	★★★★★
Jaguar XF 3.0 V6 Supercharged	178 D	£48,495	6/2995	335/6500	332/3500	1695kg	201	5.7	-	155	224	29.4	+ Fast, comfortable, refined - Bland engine, poor economy compared to diesel V6	★★★★★
Jaguar XFR	181 D	£65,415	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1800kg	284	4.8	10.2	155	270	24.4	+ Brilliant blend of pace and refinement - Doesn't sound as special as it is	★★★★★
Jaguar XFR-S	187 R	£79,995	8/5000	542/6500	501/2500	1912kg	288	4.4	-	186	270	24.4	+ XF gets turned up to 12 - Except for the soundtrack	★★★★★

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Saloons / Estates / 4x4s

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating	
Jaguar XFR-S Sportbrake	203 R	£82,495	8/5000	542/6500	501/2500	1967kg	280	4.6	-	186	297	22.2	+ Looks fantastic, huge performance, nice balance - Not as sharp as the saloon	★★★★★
Jaguar XJ3.0 V6 Diesel	148 D	£56,865	6/2993	271/4000	442/2000	1700kg	162	6.0	-	155	167	46.3	+ A great Jaguar - But not as great as the XJR...	★★★★★
Jaguar XJR	191 D	£92,370	8/5000	542/6500	502/2500	1805kg	302	4.4	-	174	270	24.4	+ Hot-rod vibe, fine cabin - Opinion-dividing looks	★★★★★
Jaguar XJR	054 R	'03-'09	8/4196	400/6100	408/3500	1665kg	244	5.0	-	155	-	23.0	+ Genuine 7-series rival - 2007 facelift didn't help middle-aged image	★★★★★
Lexus IS F	151 R	£58,416	8/4969	417/6600	372/5200	1714kg	247	4.7	10.9	173	270	24.4	+ Shockingly good Lexus - The M3's available as a (second hand) four-door too	★★★★★
Lotus Carlton	170 R	'91-'93	6/3615	377/5200	419/4200	1658kg	231	4.8	10.6	176	-	17.0	+ The Millennium Falcon of saloon cars - Every drive a quack-out	★★★★★
Maserati Ghibli	186 D	£52,615	6/2979	325/5000	406/1750	1810kg	182	5.6	-	163	223	29.4	+ Bursting with character; good value compared to Quattroporte - It's still a big car	★★★★★
Maserati Ghibli S	198 D	£63,760	6/2979	404/5500	406/4500	1810kg	227	5.0	-	177	242	27.2	+ Stands out from the crowd; sounds good too - Chassis lacks finesse, engine lacks reach	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte S	184 D	£80,115	6/2979	404/5500	406/1750	1860kg	221	5.1	-	177	242	27.2	+ Tempting alternative to V8 - Feel-free steering, secondary ride lacks decorum	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte GTS	179 D	£108,185	8/3798	523/6800	479/2250	1900kg	280	4.7	-	190	274	23.9	+ Performance, sense of occasion - Lacks the charisma and edge of its predecessor	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte S	137 R	'08-'12	8/4691	425/7000	361/4750	1990kg	216	5.1	12.1	174	365	18.0	+ A QP with the bhp it deserves - Grille is a bit Hannibal Lecter	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte Sport GTS	141 R	'08-'12	8/4691	433/7000	361/4750	1990kg	221	5.1	-	177	365	18.0	+ The most stylish supersaloon - Slightly wooden brakes, unforgiving ride	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte	085 R	'04-'08	8/4244	394/7000	333/4500	1930kg	207	5.1	-	171	-	17.9	+ Redefines big-car dynamics - Don't use auto mode	★★★★★
Maserati Quattroporte Sport GTS	113 D	'07-'08	8/4244	396/7000	339/4250	1930kg	208	5.5	-	167	-	-	+ Best Quattroporte chassis so far - More power wouldn't go amiss	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz 190E 2.5-16	185 F	'89-'92	4/2498	201/6750	177/5500	1360kg	147	7.2	-	142	-	24.4	+ M-B's M3 alternative - Not as nimble as the Beemer	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLA45 AMG	186 D	£42,265	4/1991	355/6000	332/2250	1510kg	239	4.6	-	155	161	31.0	+ Strong performance, classy cabin - Pricy compared to A45 AMG hatchback	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG	151 R	£57,275	8/6208	451/6800	442/5000	1655kg	277	4.4	9.7	160	280	23.5	+ Monstrous pace and extremely engaging - M3's just a little better...	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG	088 R	'04-'08	8/5439	367/5250	376/4000	1635kg	228	5.2	-	155	-	23.7	+ Furiously fast, commendably discreet - Overshadowed by M3 and RS4	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG	187 D	£74,095	8/5461	549/5500	531/1750	1770kg	315	4.2	-	155	230	28.8	+ Power, response and accuracy in spades - A little lacking in originality	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG S Estate	203 R	£85,900	8/5461	571/5500	590/2000	1880kg	312	4.2	-	155	234	28.8	+ Effortless power; intuitive and approachable - Dim-witted auto 'box	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG	165 R	'11-'13	8/5461	518/5250	516/1750	1765kg	298	4.2	-	155	230	28.8	+ Turbo engine doesn't dilute E63 experience - Sometimes struggles for traction...	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG	096 D	'06-'09	8/6208	507/6800	464/5200	1765kg	292	4.5	-	155	-	19.8	+ Brilliant engine, indulgent chassis - Vague steering, speed limits	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz E55 AMG	052 R	'03-'06	8/5439	476/6100	516/2650	1760kg	271	4.8	10.2	155	-	21.9	+ M5-humbling grunt, cosseting ride - Speed limits	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz S63 AMG L	191 D	£119,575	8/5461	571/5500	664/2250	1995kg	294	4.4	-	155	237	27.9	+ Monster pace - Average steering feel	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz S63 AMG	148 D	'10-'13	8/5461	536/5500	590/2000	2040kg	267	4.5	-	155	244	26.9	+ Massive torque, massively reduced emissions - Massive car	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz S65 AMG	098 R	'06-'13	12/5980	604/4750	737/2000	2185kg	281	4.4	-	155	334	19.8	+ God's own supersaloon - Unholy price and thirst	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLS63 AMG S	199 D	£86,500	8/5461	571/5500	590/1750	1795kg	327	4.1	-	155	231	28.5	+ Remains quick and characterful - Dated gearbox, no four-wheel drive option in the UK	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLS63 AMG	178 R	'11-'14	8/5461	518/5250	516/1700	1795kg	293	4.2	-	155	231	28.5	+ Monster performance, 549bhp an option - Not as desirable as a Bentley or Aston	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLS63 AMG	099 R	'06-'11	8/6208	507/6100	464/2650	1905kg	270	4.5	-	155	345	19.5	+ Beauty, comfort, awesome performance - M5 has the edge on B-roads	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz ML63 AMG	176 R	£84,125	8/5461	518/5250	516/1750	2270kg	232	4.7	-	155	276	23.9	+ Great engine, surprisingly good dynamics - £85K buys a Boxster and an ML350...	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz G63 AMG	172 D	£123,975	8/5461	537/5500	560/2000	2475kg	220	5.4	-	130	322	-	+ It exists; epic soundtrack - Ancient chassis, silly price	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-300 SST	118 R	£31,349	4/1998	290/6500	300/3500	1590kg	185	5.2	13.9	155	256	26.2	+ Evo gets twin-clutch transmission - Not as exciting as it used to be	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-360	122 D	£38,559	4/1998	354/6500	363/3500	1560kg	231	4.1	-	155	328	19.9	+ Ridiculously rapid new Evo - A five-speed gearbox?!	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-330 SST	134 R	'08-'12	4/1998	324/6500	322/3500	1590kg	207	4.4	-	155	256	-	+ Great engine and gearbox combo - It still lives in the shadow of the Evo IX	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-400	181 R	'09-'10	4/1998	403/6500	387/3500	1560kg	262	3.8	-	155	328	-	+ Most powerful factory Evo ever... -...about X grand too much when new	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo IX FQ-340	088 R	'05-'07	4/1997	345/6800	321/4600	1400kg	250	4.3	10.9	157	-	-	+ Gives Porsche drivers nightmares - Points. Lots of	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo IX MR FQ-360	181 R	'05-'07	4/1997	366/6887	363/3200	1400kg	266	3.9	-	157	-	-	+ Well-executed engine upgrades - Prison food	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VIII	055 R	'03-'04	4/1997	276/6500	289/3500	1410kg	199	5.1	-	157	-	-	+ The Evo grows up - Brakes need beefing up	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VIII MR FQ-300	057 R	'03-'05	4/1997	305/6800	289/3500	1400kg	221	4.8	-	157	-	20.5	+ Extra pace, extra attitude - Extra money	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VII	031 R	'02-'03	4/1997	276/6500	282/3500	1360kg	206	5.0	13.0	140	-	20.4	+ Terrific all-rounder - You tell us	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VII RS Sprint	041 D	'02-'03	4/1997	320/6500	327/6200	1260kg	258	4.4	-	150	-	-	+ Ruthlessly focused road weapon - For the truly committed	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VI RS Sprint	011 R	'99	4/1997	330/6500	323/3000	1255kg	267	4.5	11.8	145	-	-	+ Lighter, keener, quicker than regular Evo - A little uncompromising	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Evo VI Mäkinen Edition	200 R	'00-'01	4/1997	276/6500	275/2750	1365kg	205	4.6	-	150	-	-	+ Our favourite Evo - Subtle it is not	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera 4S	186 D	£85,721	6/2997	414/6000	383/1750	1870kg	225	4.8	-	177	208	31.7	+ Strong performance and typically fine Porsche chassis - Misses characterful V8 of old S'	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera GTS	168 D	£93,175	8/4806	430/6700	383/3500	1920kg	228	4.4	-	179	251	26.4	+ Sharper chassis; more urgent and vocal V8 - A BMW M5 is £17K less...	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera Turbo	137 R	£107,903	8/4806	493/6000	516/2250	1970kg	254	3.6	8.9	188	270	24.6	+ Fast, refined and dynamically sound - It still leaves us cold	★★★★★
Porsche Panamera Turbo S	159 D	'11-'13	8/4806	542/6000	590/2250	1995kg	276	3.7	-	190	270	24.6	+ Pace, excellent ergonomics - Steering feed	★★★★★
Porsche Macan S	198 R	£43,300	6/2997	335/5500	339/1450	1865kg	183	5.4	-	157	204	31.4	+ No less compelling than the Turbo - Although lacks its ultimate speed and agility	★★★★★
Porsche Macan Turbo	194 R	£59,300	6/3604	394/6000	406/1350	1925kg	208	4.8	-	165	208	30.7	+ Doesn't feel like an SUV - Still looks like one	★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne GTS (Mk2)	173 D	£68,117	8/4806	414/6500	380/3500	2085kg	202	5.6	-	162	251	26.4	+ Dynamically the best SUV on sale - At two tons, it's still no sports car	★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne Turbo (Mk2)	202 D	£92,628	8/4806	513/6000	533/2250	2185kg	239	4.5	-	173	261	25.2	+ Remarkable performance, handling, completeness - Bigger, heavier, pricier than Macan	★★★★★
Porsche Cayenne Turbo S (Mk2)	184 D	£107,784	8/4806	542/6000	553/2250	2255kg	249	4.5	-	175	270	24.6	+ Near-identical power and torque to a Zonda C12S - In an SUV	★★★★★
Range Rover Evoque Coupe Si4	160 D	£46,650	4/1999	237/6000	251/1900	1670kg	144	7.0	-	135	199	-	+ Striking looks, sporting dynamics - Hefty price, and petrol version is auto-only	★★★★★
Range Rover Sport V8 Supercharged	186 D	£81,550	8/4999	503/6000	460/2500	2335kg	219	5.0	-	155	298	22.1	+ Deceptively quick and capable sports SUV - It's still got a weight problem	★★★★★
Range Rover SDV8	180 D	£78,120	8/4367	334/3500	516/1750	2360kg	144	6.5	-	140	229	32.5	+ Lighter, more capable, even more luxurious - Diesel V6 model feels more alert	★★★★★
Rolls-Royce Ghost	186 D	£170,250	12/6592	563/5250	575/1500	2360kg	242	4.7	-	155	317	20.8	+ It's quicker than you think - It's more enjoyable driven slowly	★★★★★
Rolls-Royce Phantom	054 R	£276,275	12/6749	453/5350	531/3500	2560kg	180	5.7	-	149	377	18.0	+ Rolls reinvented for the 21st Century - The roads are barely big enough	★★★★★
Subaru WRX STI	201 R	£28,995	4/2457	296/6000	300/4000	1534kg	196	5.2	-	159	242	27.2	+ Fast Subaru saloon returns (again) - Without a power increase	★★★★★
Subaru WRX STI	151 D	'10-'13	4/2457	296/6000	300/4000	1505kg	200	5.1	-	158	243	26.9	+ Fast Subaru saloon returns - Without the blue paint and gold wheels	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza WRX GB270	109 D	'07	4/2457	266/5700	310/3000	1410kg	192	5.2	-	143	-	-	+ Fitting final fling for 'classic' Impreza - End of an era	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza STI	090 R	'05-'07	4/2457	276/6000	289/4000	1495kg	188	5.3	-	158	-	25.9	+ Stunning to drive - Not so needing to look at	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza STI Spec C *	084 D	'05-'07	4/1994	320/6730	311/3500	1350kg	240	4.3	-	157	-	-	+ Lighter, faster, fiercer - The need for self-restraint	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza RB200	105 R	'07	4/2457	316/6000	332/3750	1495kg	215	4.8	-	155	-	-	+ Fitting tribute to a rallying legend - Too hardcore for some?	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza WRX STI PPP	073 R	'03-'05	4/1994	300/6000	299/4000	1470kg	207	5.2	12.9	148	-	-	+ A Subaru with real edge - Bit too edgy in the wet	★★★★★
Subaru STI Type RA Spec C *	067 R	'03-'05	4/1994	335/7000	280/3750	1380kg	247	4.3	11.1	160	-	-	+ Best Impreza since the P1 - Lost its throbby flat-four voice	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza Turbo	011 R	'98-'00	4/1994	215/5600	214/4000	1235kg	177	5.4	14.6	144	-	27.2	+ Destined for classic status - Thirsty	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza PI	200 R	'00-'01	4/1994	276/6500	260/4000	1283kg	219	4.9	13.3	150	-	25.0	+ Ultimate old-shape Impreza - Prices reflect this	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza RB5 (PPP)	187 R	'99	4/1994	237/6000	258/3500	1235kg	195	5.0	14.1	143	-	-	+ Perfect blend of poise and power - Limited numbers	★★★★★
Subaru Impreza 22B	188 R	'98-'99	4/2212	276/6000	265/3200	1270kg	220	5.0	13.1	150	-	-	+ The ultimate Impreza - Doesn't come cheap	★★★★★
Tesla Model S Performance	196 R	£69,080	310kW	416	442/0	2100kg	201	4.2	-	130	0	n/a	+ Intoxicating performance, soothing refinement - Generic styling, charging limitations	★★★★★
Vauxhall Insignia VXR SuperSport	189 D	£29,749	6/2792	321/5250	321/5250	1825kg	179	5.6	-	170	249	26.6	+ A 170mph Vauxhall - Should be a more engaging steer	★★★★★
Vauxhall Vectra VXR	102 D	'06-'09	6/2792	276/5500	262/1800	1580kg	177	6.1	-	161	-	27.4	+ Great engine, effortless pace, good value - Numb steering, lumpy ride	★★★★★
Vauxhall VXR8 GTS	187 D	£54,499	8/6162	576/6150	545/3850	1834kg	311	4.2	-	155	363	18.5	+ Brawn, pace, character - Frustrating chassis settings; it's nearly C63 money	★★★★★
Vauxhall VXR8 GT	160 R	'11-'13	8/6162	425/6000	406/4600	1831kg	236	4.9	-	155	320	20.9	+ Oversteery and characterful. Available as a pick-up too! - Nearly M3 saloon money	★★★★★
Vauxhall VXR8 Bathurst S	148 R	'09	8/6162	564/6000	527/4000	1866kg	307	4.6	10.7	155	-	-	+ A tauter VXR8. Bonkers pace, brilliant noise - Gearchange still rubbish	★★★★★
Volvo S60 Polestar	179 D	£40,160	6/2953	324/5250	354/5250	1716kg	192	5.5	-	155	231	28.5	+ Capable of swift, smooth progress - Swift and smooth doesn't mean fun	★★★★★
Volvo V60 Polestar	197 D	£49,775	6/2953	345/5250	369/3000	1759kg	199	5.0	-	155	237</			



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Our Choice

Audi R8 Spyder. The Spyder boasts supercar looks, presence and performance, yet you really could drive one every day. The V8 has a sweet engine and great dynamics, but if money's no object, we'd be seriously tempted by the equally brilliant V10.



Best of the Rest

The Mk3 Porsche Boxster S is a brilliant all-rounder, while the Lotus Exige S Roadster counters with a more focused driving experience. Jaguar's F-type also impresses in both S (left) and V8 S forms. Mazda's MX-5 is best for budget rear-drive fun, but for the ultimate thrills, get a Caterham 620R or Ariel Atom.

Sports Cars / Convertibles

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2g/km	EC mpg	EVO rating	
Alfa Romeo 8C Spider	161 R	'09-'11	8/4691	450/7000	354/4750	1675kg	273	4.5	-	181	-	-	+ Beauty meets beast. They hit it off - Boot is useless for touring	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 3.5 Supercharged	180 D	£38,000	4/1998	310/8400	169/7200	550kg	573	2.7	-	155	-	-	+ As mad as ever - Rain	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 3.5R	198 R	£64,800	4/1998	350/8400	243/6100	550kg	647	2.6	-	155	-	-	+ Remarkable balance, poise and pace - Pricey	★★★★★
Ariel Atom Mugen	165 R	£55,000	4/1998	270/8300	188/6000	550kg	499	2.9	-	150	-	-	+ Perfect engine for the Atom's chassis - Only ten being made	★★★★★
Ariel Atom V8 500	165 R	£146,699	8/3000	475/10500	284/7750	550kg	877	3.0	5.8	170	-	-	+ An experience unlike anything else on Planet Car - £150K for an Atom	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 3 245	113 D	'08-'12	4/1998	245/8200	155/5200	500kg	498	3.2	-	150	-	33.0	+ The Atom just got a little bit better - Can still be a bit draughty...	★★★★★
Ariel Atom 3 Supercharged	138 R	'09-'12	4/1998	300/8200	162/7200	550kg	554	3.3	-	155	-	-	+ It's brilliant - It's mental	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage Roadster	130 R	£89,994	8/4735	420/7000	346/5750	1710kg	250	4.7	-	180	328	20.4	+ Sportiest, coolest drop-top Aston in years - Starting to feel its age	★★★★★
Aston Martin V8 Vantage S Roadster	161 R	£108,995	8/4735	430/7300	361/5000	1690kg	258	4.6	-	189	299	21.9	+ Sounds amazing, looks even better - Still not the best drop-top in its class	★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Vantage S Roadster	202 D	£147,000	12/5935	565/6750	457/5750	1745kg	329	4.1	-	201	343	-	+ A brilliant two-seat roadster... - Let down by a frustrating gearbox	★★★★★
Aston Martin V12 Vantage Roadster	175 R	'12-'14	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1760kg	294	4.4	-	190	-	-	+ As good as the coupe, with amplified V12 rumble - Just a smidgen shakier	★★★★★
Aston Martin DB9 Volante	150 D	£141,995	12/5935	470/6000	443/5000	1815kg	263	4.6	-	190	368	18.2	+ Consummate cruiser and capable when pushed - Roof-up wind noise	★★★★★
Aston Martin DBS Volante	133 D	'09-'12	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1810kg	286	4.3	-	191	388	17.3	+ A feelgood car par excellence - It's a bit of a heavyweight	★★★★★
Audi TTS Roadster	122 D	'08-'14	4/1984	268/6000	258/2500	1455kg	187	5.6	-	155	189	34.9	+ Effortlessly quick - Long-term appeal open to question	★★★★★
Audi TT RS Roadster	133 D	'09-'14	5/2480	335/5400	332/1600	1510kg	225	4.7	-	155	212	31.0	+ Terrific engine... - Is the best thing about it	★★★★★
Audi TT Roadster (Mk1 225bhp)	016 R	'00-'06	4/1781	225/5900	206/2200	1395kg	164	6.9	20.0	150	-	30.4	+ Winner on the King's Road - Trails Boxster on the open road	★★★★★
Audi S5 Cabriolet	130 D	£46,770	6/2995	328/5500	325/2900	1875kg	178	5.6	-	155	199	33.2	+ Gets the S4's trick supercharged engine - Bordering on dull	★★★★★
Audi RS5 Cabriolet	179 D	£69,505	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1920kg	235	4.9	-	155	249	26.4	+ Pace, looks, interior, naturally aspirated V8 - Not the last word in fun or involvement	★★★★★
Audi RS4 Cabriolet	094 D	'06-'08	8/4163	414/7800	317/5500	1845kg	228	4.9	-	155	-	-	+ That engine - Wibble wobble, wibble wobble, jelly on a plate	★★★★★
Audi R8 V8 Spyder	186 D	£102,385	8/4163	424/7900	317/6000	1660kg	259	4.8	-	187	337	19.6	+ More delicate and subtle than the V10 - The V10 sounds even better	★★★★★
Audi R8 V10 Spyder	185 R	£123,485	10/5204	518/8000	391/6500	1720kg	306	4.1	-	194	349	19.0	+ Sensational for the money - Not quite a rival for the 458 and 12C Spiders	★★★★★
BAC Mono	189 R	£114,045	4/2261	280/7700	206/6000	540kg	527	2.8	-	170	-	-	+ The most single-minded track car available - That means no passengers...	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT V8 Convertible	168 R	£150,200	8/3993	500/6000	487/1700	2395kg	212	4.7	-	187	254	25.9	+ One of the world's best topless GTs - Still no sports car	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GT V8 S Convertible	194 D	£160,500	8/3993	521/6000	502/1700	2395kg	221	4.5	-	191	258	25.4	+ A true drivers' Bentley - Excessively heavy, feels like it could give more	★★★★★
Bentley Conti GT Speed Convertible	187 D	£181,000	12/5998	626/6000	605/1700	2420kg	263	4.1	-	203	347	19.0	+ Effortless performance, style - Running costs a tad on the high side	★★★★★
Bentley Continental Supersports	147 D	'10-'12	12/5998	621/6000	590/2000	2395kg	263	3.9	-	202	388	17.3	+ Fast, capable and refined - Coupe does the Supersports thing better	★★★★★
Bentley Continental GTC Speed	131 D	'09-'11	12/5998	600/6000	590/1750	2485kg	245	4.5	-	200	396	17.0	+ A great convertible just got better - Optional carbon brakes a necessity	★★★★★
BMW Z4 sDrive 35i M Sport (Mk2)	186 D	£43,005	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1505kg	204	5.2	-	155	219	30.1	+ Looks, hard-top versatility, drivetrain - Clumsy chassis is upset by ragged surfaces	★★★★★
BMW Z4 3.0si (Mk1)	094 D	'06-'09	6/2996	265/6600	232/2750	1310kg	205	5.7	-	155	-	32.9	+ Terrific straight-six - Handling not as playful as we'd like	★★★★★
BMW Z4 Roadster	091 R	'06-'09	6/3246	338/7900	269/4900	1410kg	244	4.8	-	155	-	23.3	+ Exhilarating and characterful, that engine - Stiff suspension	★★★★★
BMW M Roadster	002 R	'98-'02	6/3246	325/7400	258/4900	1375kg	240	5.3	-	155	-	25.4	+ Fresh-air M3, that motor, hunky looks - M Coupe drives better	★★★★★
BMW 435i Convertible	194 D	£44,980	6/2979	302/5800	295/1200	1740kg	176	5.6	-	155	190	34.8	+ Impressive chassis, smart looks, neat roof - Extra weight, not as composed as coupe	★★★★★
BMW M4 Convertible (F83)	202 D	£60,745	6/2979	425/5500	406/1850	1750kg	247	4.6	-	155	213	31.0	+ As good as fast four-seat drop-tops get... - ...but still not as good as a coupe or saloon	★★★★★
BMW M3 Convertible (E93)	119 D	'08-'13	8/3999	414/8300	295/3900	1810kg	232	5.3	-	155	297	22.2	+ M DCT transmission, pace, slick roof - Extra weight blunts the edge	★★★★★
BMW M3 Convertible (E46)	035 D	'01-'06	6/3246	338/7900	269/5000	1655kg	207	5.3	-	155	-	23.3	+ That engine - Gets the wobbles on British B-roads	★★★★★
BMW M6 Convertible	098 D	'06-'10	10/4999	500/7750	384/6100	1930kg	264	4.8	-	155	352	19.2	+ Composure, grip, power, comfort - Steering lacks feel at low speed	★★★★★
BMW Z8	026 R	'00-'03	8/4941	400/6600	369/3800	1585kg	256	4.8	11.1	155	-	14.4	+ M5-powered super-sportster - M5's more fun to drive	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 160	198 R	£18,330	4/660	80/7000	79/3400	490kg	166	6.5	-	100	-	-	+ The fabulous Seven formula at its most basic - Gets pricey with options	★★★★★
Caterham Seven Roadsport 125	105 R	£23,330	4/1595	125/6100	120/5350	539kg	235	5.9	-	112	-	-	+ New Ford-engined model is just great - Bigger drivers need SV model	★★★★★
Caterham Seven Supersport	165 R	£24,830	4/1595	140/6900	120/5790	520kg	273	4.9	-	120	-	-	+ One of the best Caterhams is less than £20k... - ...if you build it yourself	★★★★★
Caterham Seven Supersport R	180 D	£28,330	4/1999	180/7300	143/6100	535kg	342	4.8	-	130	-	-	+ The best road-and-track Seven yet - Impractical, noisy, uncomfortable	★★★★★
Caterham Seven Superlight R400	105 R	£36,330	4/1999	210/7800	152/5750	525kg	406	3.8	-	140	-	-	+ R400 reborn with (lots of) Ford power - Slightly hesitant low-rev pick-up	★★★★★
Caterham Seven Superlight R500	123 R	£43,055	4/1999	263/8500	177/7200	506kg	528	2.9	-	150	-	-	+ Better power-to-weight ratio than a Veyron - Until you add the driver	★★★★★
Caterham Seven CSR 260 Superlight	094 R	£45,330	4/2261	256/7500	200/6200	565kg	460	3.8	-	155	-	-	+ Brilliant for high days, holidays and trackdays - Wet Wednesdays	★★★★★
Caterham Seven 620R	187 R	£50,555	4/1999	311/7700	219/7350	545kg	580	2.8	-	155	-	-	+ Banzai on track, yet still relevant on the road - £50k for a Seven?	★★★★★
Caterham Seven Superlight R300	150 R	'09-'12	4/1999	175/7000	139/6000	515kg	345	4.5	-	140	-	-	+ Possibly all the Caterham you need - They're not cheap	★★★★★
Caterham Levante	131 R	'09-'10	8/2398	550/10000	300/8500	520kg	1074	4.8	8.2	150	-	-	+ Twice the power-to-weight ratio of a Veyron! - Not easy to drive slowly	★★★★★
Caterham Seven R300	068 R	'02-'06	4/1796	160/7000	130/5000	500kg	325	4.7	-	130	-	-	+ Our 2002 Trackday Car of the Year - Not for wimps	★★★★★
Caterham Seven R400	068 R	'03-'06	4/1796	200/7500	150/5750	490kg	415	3.9	-	140	-	-	+ Race-car with a number plate - Your missus will leave you	★★★★★
Caterham Seven R500	200 R	'99-'06	4/1796	230/8600	155/7200	460kg	510	3.6	8.8	146	-	-	+ The K-series Seven at its very best - No cup holders	★★★★★
Caterham Seven R500 Evolution	069 R	'04	4/1998	250/8000	190/4000	460kg	552	3.9	8.1	150	-	-	+ Maddier than Mad Jack McMad - Er, it's a bit mad	★★★★★
Donkervoort D8 GTO Performance	185 R	£120,000	5/2480	375/5500	350/1750	695kg	548	2.8	-	168	-	-	+ There's nothing else like it - Pricey for a car with a five-cylinder engine	★★★★★
Ferrari California T	198 D	£154,490	8/3855	552/7500	557/4750	1729kg	324	3.6	-	196	250	26.9	+ Turbocharged engine is a triumph - Still places daily useability above outright thrills	★★★★★
Ferrari California	171 D	'08-'14	8/4297	483/7750	372/5000	1705kg	290	3.8	-	193	299	-	+ Revised with sharper performance and dynamics - We'd still take a 458 Spider	★★★★★
Honda S2000	118 D	'99-'09	4/1997	237/8300	153/7500	1260kg	191	6.2	-	150	-	28.2	+ An alternative and rev-happy roadster - The Boxster's better	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type Convertible	186 R	£58,535	6/2995	335/6500	332/3500	1597kg	213	5.3	-	161	205	32.1	+ Beautiful, enjoyable, responsive - Noticeably junior to the V6 S	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type S Convertible	183 R	£67,535	6/2995	375/6500	339/3500	1614kg	236	4.9	-	171	209	32.1	+ Better-damped and more rounded than the V8 S - A Boxster S is £20k cheaper	★★★★★
Jaguar F-type V8 S Convertible	183 R	£79,995	8/5000	488/6500	461/2500	1665kg	298	4.3	-	186	259	25.5	+ Wilder than the V6 S - Could be too exuberant for some	★★★★★
Jaguar XK 5.0 Convertible		£60,975	8/5000	380/6500	380/3500	1621kg	238	5.3	-	155	264	25.2	+ Basic XK gets extra power... - ...but loses some of its GT refinement	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR Convertible	130 R	£75,975	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1725kg	296	4.6	-	155	292	23.0	+ Gains Jag's fantastic new V8 - Loses sporting ground to its main foes	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR-S Convertible	167 R	£104,490	8/5000	542/6500	502/2500	1725kg	319	4.2	-	186	292	23.0	+ Loud and mad; most exciting Jag in years - It's also the most expensive in years	★★★★★
Jaguar XK	089 R	'06-'09	8/4196	294/6000	303/4100	1635kg	183	6.6	-	155	-	25.0	+ Every bit as good as the XK coupe - 294bhp still only just enough	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR		'06-'09	8/4196	414/6250	413/4000	1705kg	247	5.0	-	155	-	-	+ First Jag sports car for years - Overwrought detailing	★★★★★
Jaguar XKR	004 R	'97-'06	8/3996	370/6150	387/3600	1750kg	215	5.4	12.8	155	-	15.6	+ Hurricane-in-the-hair motoring - A danger to toupees everywhere	★★★★★
KTM X-Bow GT	183 D	£95,880	4/1984	281/6400	310/3200	875kg	326	4.1	-	144	189	34.0	+ Extraordinary ability, now in a more road-friendly package - Price	★★★★★
KTM X-Bow R	165 R	£87,480	4/1984	296/5500	295/3300	818kg	368	3.6	-	144	-	-	+ Sharper handling, more power - Pity it's not even lighter, and cheaper	★★★★★
KTM X-Bow	138 R	'08-'12	4/1984	237/5500	229/2000	818kg	294	3.8	-	137	-	-	+ Mad looks; real quality feel - Heavier and pricier than you'd hope	★★★★★

PAST master

Can a Berlin taxi outpace a Ferrari F40? It can if it's got 574bhp, as John Barker found out in March 1999

Brabus EV12 Issue 005, March 1999

It's an understatement to say that the Brabus EV12 is a master of understatement. At first glance the speedo appears to be calibrated in kph, the last marking being 220. It's mph, of course...

The starter motor whirrs in double time and the engine catches with a complex, sonorous V12 burble. Close your eyes

and you're in a Diablo, not a Mercedes. It's worth savouring.

The Brabus takes off like an elephant that's backed onto a cattle prod, the V12 wails, the rear tyres tear at asphalt, the tail squirms and judders left and right. It's fast all right but not terrifyingly so. This, you sense, is deep-chested power for the long haul, the big push to 200mph.



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Sports Cars / Convertibles

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	EVO rating
Lotus Elise 1.6	144 D	£30,900	4/1598	134/6800	118/4400	876kg	155	6.0	-	127	149	45.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Lotus Elise 1.6 Club Racer	183 R	£30,900	4/1598	134/6800	118/4400	852kg	160	6.0	-	127	149	45.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Lotus Elise S	172 R	£37,200	4/1798	217/6800	184/4600	924kg	239	4.2	-	145	175	37.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Lotus Elise S Club Racer	189 D	£37,200	4/1798	217/6800	184/4600	905kg	244	4.2	-	145	175	37.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Lotus Elise S Roadster	186 R	£55,500	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1166kg	301	4.0	-	145	236	28.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Lotus Elise R	068 R	'04-'11	4/1796	189/7800	133/6800	860kg	223	5.6	13.9	150	196	34.4	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Lotus Elise SC	131 R	'08-'11	4/1794	218/8000	156/5000	870kg	254	4.5	11.4	148	199	33.2	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Lotus Elise S 1.8	104 R	'06-'10	4/1794	134/6200	127/4200	860kg	158	6.3	18.7	127	-	37.2	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Lotus Elise 111S	049 R	'02-'04	4/1796	156/7000	129/4650	860kg	197	5.1	-	131	-	40.9	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Lotus Elise Sport 135	040 D	'03	4/1796	135/6200	129/4850	726kg	189	5.4	-	129	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Lotus Elise Sport 190	044 R	'03	4/1796	190/7800	128/5000	710kg	272	4.7	12.1	135	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Lotus Elise (SI)	126 R	'96-'00	4/1796	118/5500	122/3000	731kg	164	6.1	18.5	126	-	39.4	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Lotus 2-Eleven Supercharged	123 R	'07-'11	4/1796	252/8000	179/7000	670kg	382	3.8	-	150	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Lotus 2-Eleven GT4	138 R	'09-'11	4/1796	266/8200	179/7200	670kg	403	3.7	-	155	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Lotus 2-Eleven	126 R	'07-'11	4/1796	189/7800	133/6800	720kg	267	4.3	-	140	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Lotus 340R	126 R	'00	4/1796	190/7800	146/5000	658kg	293	4.5	12.5	126	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Lotus Elan SE	095 R	'89-'95	4/1588	165/6600	148/4200	1022kg	164	6.7	-	137	-	21.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Maserati GranCabrio	142 D	£98,340	8/4691	434/7000	332/4500	1980kg	223	5.2	-	177	337	19.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Maserati GranCabrio Sport	161 D	£103,935	8/4691	444/7000	376/4750	1980kg	228	5.0	-	177	377	19.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Maserati GranCabrio MC	185 D	£111,770	8/4691	454/7000	383/4750	1973kg	234	4.9	-	179	337	19.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Mazda MX-5 1.8i SE (Mk3.5)		£18,495	4/1798	124/6500	123/4500	1075kg	117	9.9	-	121	167	39.8	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Mazda MX-5 R'ster Coupe 2.0i (Mk3.5)	170 R	£23,095	4/1999	158/7000	139/5000	1173kg	137	7.9	-	136	181	36.2	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Mazda MX-5 1.8i (Mk3)	091 R	'05-'09	4/1798	124/6500	123/4500	1155kg	108	9.3	-	122	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Mazda MX-5 1.8i (Mk2)	017 R	'98-'05	4/1839	146/7000	124/5000	1065kg	140	8.6	-	123	-	32.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Mazda MX-5 1.6 (Mk1)	131 R	'89-'97	4/1597	115/6500	100/5500	971kg	120	9.0	-	114	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Mercedes-Benz SLK350 Sport	161 R	£44,605	6/3498	302/6500	273/3500	1465kg	209	5.5	-	155	167	39.8	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Mercedes-Benz SLK55 AMG	186 R	£55,345	8/5461	416/6800	398/4500	1615kg	262	4.6	-	155	195	33.6	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Mercedes-Benz SLK55 AMG	087 R	'05-'10	8/5439	355/5750	376/4000	1575kg	229	4.9	-	155	-	23.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Mercedes-Benz SLK55 AMG Black	110 R	'07-'08	8/5439	394/5750	383/3750	1495kg	268	4.9	11.2	174	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Mercedes-Benz SL500	169 D	£81,915	8/4663	429/5250	516/1800	1710kg	255	4.6	-	155	212	31.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Mercedes-Benz SL63 AMG	171 D	£112,510	8/5461	530/5500	590/2000	1770kg	304	4.3	-	155	231	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG	183 D	£170,815	12/5980	621/4800	737/2300	1875kg	336	4.0	-	155	270	24.4	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Mercedes-Benz SL63 AMG	171 D	'08-'13	8/6208	518/6800	464/5200	1970kg	278	4.6	-	155	328	20.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Mercedes-Benz SL55 AMG	070 D	'02-'07	8/5439	493/6100	516/2650	1955kg	256	4.6	10.2	155	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG	071 D	'04-'10	12/5980	604/4800	737/2000	2035kg	302	4.1	-	155	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Mercedes-Benz SL55 AMG Roadster	167 R	£176,985	8/6208	563/6800	479/4750	1660kg	345	3.7	-	197	308	21.4	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Mini JCW Convertible (R57)	130 R	£24,950	4/1598	208/6000	206/1850	1230kg	172	6.9	-	146	169	38.7	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Morgan 3 Wheeler	198 R	£25,950	2/1976	82/5250	103/3250	525kg	159	6.0	-	115	215	30.3	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Morgan Plus 8 Speedster	202 R	£69,995	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1000kg	368	4.2	-	148	282	23.3	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Morgan Plus 8	171 R	£86,345	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1100kg	334	4.4	-	155	256	25.7	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Morgan Aero SuperSports	145 R	£128,045	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1180kg	312	4.2	-	170	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Morgan Aero 8	105 R	'02-'08	8/4799	362/6300	361/3400	1100kg	334	4.5	-	170	-	25.2	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Nissan 370Z Roadster	143 R	'10-'14	6/3696	326/7000	269/5200	1554kg	213	5.5	-	155	262	25.2	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Porsche Boxster (981)	172 R	£38,810	6/2706	261/6700	206/4500	1310kg	202	5.4	-	164	192	34.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Porsche Boxster S (981)	186 R	£47,035	6/3436	311/6700	265/4500	1320kg	239	5.1	-	173	206	32.1	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Porsche Boxster GTS (981)	203 D	£52,879	6/3436	325/6700	273/4500	1345kg	246	5.0	-	174	211	31.4	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Porsche Boxster (987)		'05-'12	6/2893	252/6400	214/4400	1335kg	192	5.9	-	163	221	30.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Porsche Boxster S (987)	161 R	'05-'12	6/3436	306/6400	265/5500	1355kg	229	5.3	-	170	223	29.7	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Porsche Boxster Spyder (987)	188 R	'10-'12	6/3436	316/7200	273/4750	1275kg	252	5.0	-	166	221	29.1	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Porsche Boxster (986)	049 R	'99-'04	6/2687	228/6300	192/4700	1275kg	182	6.3	-	155	-	29.1	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Porsche Boxster S (986)	070 R	'99-'04	6/3179	260/6200	228/4700	1320kg	200	5.5	-	164	-	26.9	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Porsche 911 Carrera Cabriolet (991)	183 R	£82,072	6/3436	345/7400	288/5600	1450kg	242	5.0	-	178	217	30.7	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Porsche 911 Carrera S Cabriolet (991)	171 R	£92,108	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1465kg	273	4.6	-	187	229	29.1	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Porsche 911 Turbo Cabriolet (997)	139 D	'07-'12	6/3800	493/6000	479/1950	1645kg	305	3.8	-	194	275	24.1	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Porsche 911 Turbo Cabriolet (996)	060 R	'03-'05	6/3596	414/6000	413/4600	1700kg	250	4.7	-	185	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Radical SR3 SL	174 R	£81,300	4/2000	300/6000	265/4000	795kg	383	3.0	-	161	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Radical SR8LM	138 R	'09-'12	8/2800	460/10,500	260/8000	680kg	687	3.2	-	168	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Renault Sport Spider	183 R	'96-'99	4/1998	148/6000	136/4500	930kg	157	6.5	-	131	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Tesla Roadster	131 R	'08-'12	185kW	248/4500	273/0	1283kg	196	5.0	14.3	120	0	n/a	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Toyota MR2	187 R	'00-'06	4/1794	138/6400	125/4400	975kg	141	7.2	21.2	130	-	38.2	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
TVR Tamora	070 R	'01-'07	6/3605	350/7200	290/5500	1050kg	338	4.5	-	160	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
TVR Tuscan Convertible	091 R	'05-'07	6/3996	365/6800	315/6000	1100kg	337	3.8	8.1	195+	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
TVR Chimera 5.0	007 R	'93-'03	8/4988	320/5500	320/3750	1060kg	307	4.6	-	167	-	26.4	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
TVR Griffith 4.3	068 R	'92-'93	8/4280	280/5500	305/4000	1060kg	268	4.8	11.2	148	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
TVR Griffith V500	009 R	'93-'01	8/4988	320/5500	320/3750	1060kg	307	4.8	11.2	167	-	22.1	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Vauxhall VX220	023 R	'00-'04	4/2198	145/5800	150/4000	875kg	168	5.6	-	136	-	34.4	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Vauxhall VX220 Turbo	066 R	'03-'05	4/1998	197/5500	184/1950	930kg	215	4.7	-	151	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★



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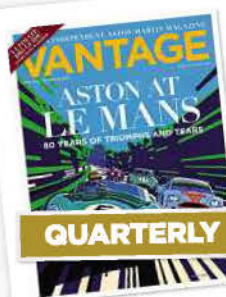


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Our Choice

Porsche 911 GT3. You might think the GT3's win at *evo* Car of the Year 2013 was a foregone conclusion, but neither of the last two GT3s (the 997.2 and 997.1) claimed an *eCoty* title. Yet the 991 managed it, and in a vintage year too (Ferrari F12, Merc SLS Black). Yes, it really is that good.



Best of the Rest

Aston's V12 Vantage S (left) is a deeply well-sorted drivers' car. Porsche's second-gen Cayman S is a truly great all-rounder, or for similar money the Lotus Evija S is a proper road racer and was our joint 2012 Car of the Year. BMW's M4 and Jaguar's F-type S Coupe would both make great everyday propositions.

Coupes / GTs

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	evo rating
Alfa Romeo 4C	190 R	£45,000	4/1742	237/6000	258/2200	895kg	269	4.5	-	160	157	41.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Carbonfibre tub, mini-supercar looks - Hot hatch engine, clunky gearbox
Alfa Romeo 8C Competizione	120 R	'07-'09	8/4691	450/7000	354/4750	1585kg	288	4.1	-	181	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Looks, exclusivity, noise, balance - They're all sold
Alpina B3 Biturbo (E92)	108 R	'07-'13	6/2979	355/5500	369/3800	1570kg	230	4.8	-	177	-	29.1	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Alpina's M3 alternative - Too refined for some
Alpina B3 GT3 (E92)	176 D	'12-'13	6/2979	402/6000	398/4500	1535kg	266	4.4	-	186	224	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Alpina's M3 GT3 alternative - Auto gearbox frustrates when pressing on
Aston Martin V8 Vantage	169 D	£84,995	8/4735	420/7000	346/5750	1630kg	262	4.7	-	180	328	20.4	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + 2012 upgrades keep the V8 Vantage on song - Starting to feel a little dated, though
Aston Martin V8 Vantage S	168 R	£99,995	8/4735	430/7300	361/5000	1610kg	271	4.5	-	189	299	21.9	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Keener engine, V12 Vantage looks - Slightly sluggish auto only
Aston Martin V12 Vantage S	190 R	£138,000	12/5935	565/6750	457/5750	1665kg	345	3.7	-	205	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + The best car Aston Martin currently makes - Old-school automated 'box
Aston Martin V12 Vantage	146 R	'09-'13	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1680kg	308	4.4	9.7	190	388	17.3	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + The car we hoped the V8 Vantage would be - Erm, a tad thirsty?
Aston Martin V12 Zagato	181 F	'13	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1680kg	308	4.2	-	190	388	17.3	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + The looks, the noise, the way it drives - It's several times the price of a V12 Vantage
Aston Martin DB9	178 R	£131,995	12/5935	510/6500	457/5500	1785kg	290	4.6	-	183	368	18.2	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Better than the old DB9 in every respect - Automatic gearbox could be quicker
Aston Martin DBS	142 R	'07-'12	12/5935	510/6500	420/5750	1695kg	306	4.2	-	191	388	17.3	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Stupendous engine, gearbox, brakes - Pricey. Can bite the unwary
Aston Martin DB7 Vantage	010 R	'00-'05	12/5935	420/6000	400/5000	1770kg	241	4.9	11.2	185	-	18.6	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + DB7 with near-supercar pace - Handling lacks edge
Audi TT 2.0 TFSI quattro (Mk3)	203 D	£32,785	4/1984	227/4500	273/1600	1335kg	173	5.3	-	155	149	44.1	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Looks, interior, decent performance and handling - Lacks ultimate involvement
Audi TTS (Mk3)	202 R	£38,900	4/1984	306/5800	280/1800	1365kg	228	4.9	-	155	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + The most dynamically interesting TT yet - Still not as interactive as a Cayman
Audi TT 2.0 TFSI (Mk2)	155 R	'06-'14	4/1984	208/4300	258/1600	1295kg	163	6.3	15.7	152	154	42.8	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Front-driver loses nothing to quattro TTs - Steers like a computer game
Audi TTS (Mk2)	193 R	'08-'14	4/1984	268/6000	258/2500	1395kg	195	5.4	-	155	184	35.8	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Usefully quicker TT, great drivetrain - Still steers like a computer game
Audi TT RS (Mk2)	158 R	'09-'14	5/2480	335/5400	332/1600	1450kg	235	4.4	11.1	155	209	31.4	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Sublime 5-cylinder turbo engine - Rest of package can't quite match it
Audi TT RS Plus (Mk2)	185 D	'12-'14	5/2480	355/5500	343/1650	1450kg	249	4.3	-	174	209	31.4	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Stonkingly fast cross-country - Shockingly expensive for a TT
Audi TT Sport (Mk1)	081 D	'05-'06	4/1781	237/5700	236/2300	1390kg	173	5.7	-	155	-	30.3	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Deliciously purposeful interior, crisp chassis - Numb steering
Audi S5	189 D	£43,665	6/2995	328/5500	325/2900	1675kg	199	4.9	-	155	190	34.9	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Supercharged V6 makes S5 cleaner and faster - Poor body control
Audi RS5		£59,870	8/4163	444/8250	317/4000	1715kg	245	4.5	-	155	246	26.9	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Brilliant engine and improved chassis - Still not as exciting as you'd hope
Audi R8 V8	201 R	£93,735	8/4163	424/7900	317/4500	1560kg	276	4.1	9.9	188	332	19.9	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + A true 911 alternative - Exclusivity comes at a price
Audi R8 V10	181 D	£114,835	10/5204	518/8000	391/6500	1620kg	325	3.9	8.4	194	346	19.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Real supercar feel - The V8 is £20k less, and still superb
Audi R8 V10 Plus	190 R	£126,835	10/5204	542/8000	398/6500	1570kg	351	3.8	-	198	346	19.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + An R8 fit to take on the 458 and 12C - Firm ride may be too much for some
Audi R8 GT	169 F	'10-'12	10/5204	552/8000	398/6500	1520kg	369	3.6	-	199	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Everything we love about the R8 - Not as hardcore as we wanted
Bentley Continental GT V8	178 R	£136,500	8/3993	500/6000	487/1700	2220kg	229	4.6	-	188	246	27.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + A proper drivers' Bentley with decent economy - V12 suddenly seems pointless
Bentley Continental GT	152 D	£146,700	12/5998	567/6000	516/1700	2245kg	257	4.3	-	197	338	19.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + 200mph in utter comfort - Weight, thirst
Bentley Continental GT Speed	200 D	£164,500	12/5998	626/6000	605/1700	2245kg	283	4.0	-	206	338	19.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + 206mph in utter comfort - Ageing styling
Bentley Continental GT3-R	203 D	£237,500	8/3993	572/6000	518/1700	2120kg	274	3.6	-	170	295	22.2	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + The best-handling Continental ever - Expensive; it still weighs 2120kg
BMW 1-series M Coupe	188 R	'11-'12	6/2979	335/5900	369/1500	1495kg	228	4.8	-	155	224	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Character, turbo pace and great looks - Came and went too quick
BMW 135i M Sport Coupe	113 R	'08-'12	6/2979	302/5800	295/1300	1455kg	211	5.3	-	155	198	33.2	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Fast, fun, lots cheaper than an M3 - You really want the 1-series M Coupe
BMW 220d SE Coupe	200 D	£25,865	4/1995	181/4000	280/1750	1375kg	134	7.2	-	143	119	62.8	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Chassis balance, economy, interior - Bland styling, uncultured diesel engine
BMW M235i Coupe	196 R	£34,260	6/2979	321/5800	332/1300	1455kg	224	5.0	-	155	189	34.9	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Powertrain, chassis, looks, size - Limited-slip diff is an option, not standard
BMW 435i M Sport Coupe	189 D	£41,665	6/2979	302/5800	295/1200	1510kg	203	5.4	-	155	169	35.8	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Better balance than 3-series saloon - Rest of package can't quite match it
BMW 435d xDrive M Sport Coupe	195 D	£45,045	6/2993	309/4400	465/1500	1625kg	193	4.7	-	155	146	50.4	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Pace, grip, economy - Not the sharpest steer; slow-responding gearbox
BMW M4	199 R	£56,650	6/2979	425/5500	406/1850	1497kg	288	4.3	-	155	204	32.1	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Ferociously fast - Only really sparkles when you're on or over the limit
BMW M3 (E92)	196 R	'07-'13	8/3999	414/8300	295/3900	1580kg	266	4.3	10.3	155	290	22.8	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Fends off all of its rivals - ...except the cheaper 1-series M
BMW M3 GT3 (E92)	171 R	'10-'11	8/4361	444/8300	324/3750	1530kg	295	4.3	-	193	295	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Highly exclusive, one of the most focused M-cars ever - Good luck trying to find one
BMW M3 (E46)	066 R	'00-'07	6/3246	338/7900	269/5000	1495kg	230	5.1	12.3	155	-	23.7	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + One of the best BMWs ever - Slightly artificial steering feel
BMW M3 CS (E46)	088 R	'05-'07	6/3246	338/7900	269/5000	1495kg	230	5.1	-	155	-	23.7	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + CSL dynamics without CSL price - Looks like the standard car
BMW M3 CSL (E46)	200 R	'03-'04	6/3246	355/7900	273/4900	1385kg	260	5.3	12.0	155	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Still superb - Changes from the automated single-clutch 'box are... a... bit... sluggish
BMW M3 (E36)	148 R	'93-'98	6/3201	321/7400	258/3250	1460kg	223	5.4	12.8	157	-	25.7	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Performance, image - Never quite as good as the original
BMW M3 (E30)	165 R	'86-'90	4/2302	212/6750	170/4600	1165kg	185	6.7	17.8	147	-	20.3	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Best M-car ever! Race-car dynamics for the road - LHD only
BMW Z4 M Coupe	097 R	'06-'09	6/3246	338/7900	269/4900	1420kg	242	5.0	-	155	-	23.3	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + A real drivers' car - You've got to be prepared to get stuck in
BMW M Coupe	005 R	'98-'03	6/3246	325/7400	258/3250	1375kg	240	5.1	-	155	-	25.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Quick and characterful - Lacks finesse
BMW 640d	165 D	£63,130	6/2993	309/4400	465/1500	1790kg	175	5.5	-	155	144	51.4	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Great engine and economy, excellent build - Numb steering, unsettled B-road ride
BMW M6 (Mk2)	191 D	£94,625	8/4395	552/6000	501/1500	1850kg	303	4.2	-	155	232	28.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Mighty ability, pace, technology - You'll want the Competition Package upgrade too...
BMW M6 (Mk1)	106 R	'05-'10	10/4999	500/7750	384/6100	1635kg	311	4.8	10.0	155	342	19.8	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Awesome GT, awesome sports car - SMG gearbox now off the pace
BMW i8	203 R	£99,895	3/1500	357/5800	420/3700	1485kg	244	4.4	-	155	49	134.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Brilliantly executed concept; sci-fi looks - Safe dynamic set-up
Chevrolet Camaro	148 R	£35,345	8/6162	426/5900	420/4600	1769kg	245	5.1	-	155	329	20.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Looks like a Transformer made real - We'd prefer it in robot mode
Chevrolet Corvette Stingray Z51 (C7)	197 R	£61,520	8/6162	460/6000	465/4600	1539kg	304	4.4	9.4	180	279	23.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Performance, chassis balance, supple ride - Body control could be better
Ford Mustang GT	202 R	£34,000	8/4951	420/6500	400/4250	1678kg	254	4.4	-	155	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Great bang per buck, but now handles too - Ride quality may not suit UK roads
Ford Shelby GT500 *	178 R	£60,000	8/5812	662/6500	631/4000	1477kg	385	3.5	-	202	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Huge performance for the money - Putting it to use takes nerve
Ginetta G40R	165 R	£35,940	4/1999	175/6700	140/5000	795kg	224	5.8	-	140	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + A race-compliant sports car for the road - Feels too soft to be a hardcore track toy
Ginetta G60	165 D	£68,000	6/3721	310/6500	288/4500	1080kg	292	4.9	-	165	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Reborn Fabio GTs boasts great engine and good looks - The ride still needs work
Honda CR-Z GT	144 R	£23,675	4/1797	122/6100	128/1500	1198kg	103	9.9	-	124	117	56.5	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + The first hybrid with sporting intent - No match for a good diesel hot hatch
Honda Integra Type R (DC2)	200 R	'96-'00	4/1797	187/8000	131/7300	1101kg	173	6.2	17.9	145	-	28.9	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Arguably the greatest front-drive car ever - Too raw for some
Honda NSX	188 R	'90-'05	6/3179	276/7300	224/5300	1410kg	196	5.5	-	168	-	22.8	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + The useable supercar - 270bhp sounds a bit weedy today
Honda NSX-R *	051 R	'02-'03	6/3179	276/7300	224/5300	1270kg	221	4.4	-	168	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + evo Car of the Year 2002 - Honda never brought it to the UK
Hyundai Veloster Turbo	176 D	£22,000	4/1591	184/5500	195/1500	1313kg	142	8.2	-	133	157	40.9	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + The usual Hyundai value, with added fun - Styling might be too quirky for some
Jaguar F-type S Coupe	202 R	£60,250	6/2995	375/6500	339/3500	1594kg	239	4.5	11.4	171	209	32.1	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Exquisite style, more rewarding (and affordable) than roadster - Scrappy on the limit
Jaguar F-type R Coupe	203 R	£85,000	8/5000	542/6500	501/3500	1650kg	334	4.2	-	186	259	25.4	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Looks, presence, performance, soundtrack - Bumpy and boistrous
Jaguar XK	130 D	£54,975	8/5000	380/6500	380/3500	1585kg	244	5.2	-	155	264	25.2	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Fine car for the likes of us - Jag buyers may not like the harder edge
Jaguar XKR	168 R	£69,975	8/5000	503/6000	461/2500	1678kg	305	4.6	-	155	292	23.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Fast and incredibly rewarding Jag - The kids will have to stay at home
Jaguar XKR-S	168 R	£97,490	8/5000	542/6000	502/2500	1678kg	328	4.2	-	186	292	23.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Faster and wilder than regular XKR - The F-type R Coupe
Jaguar XKR-SGT	193 R	'14	8/5000	542/6000	502/2500	1638kg	336	3.9	-	186	292	23.0	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + The most exciting XKR ever - It's £135,000, and a very limited edition
Lexus RC F	202 R	£59,995	8/4969	471/7100	391/4800	1765kg	271	4.5	-	168	-	-	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ + Great steering, noise, sense of occasion - Too heavy to be truly exciting

POCKET buying guide

Aston V8/V12 Vantage

Years 2005-present
Engine V8 4281/V8 4735/V12 5935cc
Power 380/420/510bhp **Torque**
 302/346/420lb ft **0-60mph** 4.8/4.7/4.4sec
Top speed 175/180/190mph



WHY WOULD YOU?

Whichever engine you opt for, the Vantage delivers a spine-tingling exhaust note to shame many a rival, and the V12 has staggering thrust. They're probably the best-handling modern Astons too, with phenomenal grip and traction.

WHAT TO PAY

Early V8s begin at £30k, rising to £43k for a later 4.3. 4.7 V8s start at £40k, early V12s from £77k.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Timing cover gaskets can fail on V8s, preceded by leaks. Labour costs make replacement expensive. Clutches cost £2500, more for the V12 - a heavier-than-usual pedal signifies impending bills. Check the CCM discs on the V12, as a full set, plus pads, can cost five figures. Serious corrosion not a problem, but some show light bubbling at the base of the A-pillars. (Full guide, *evo* 198.)

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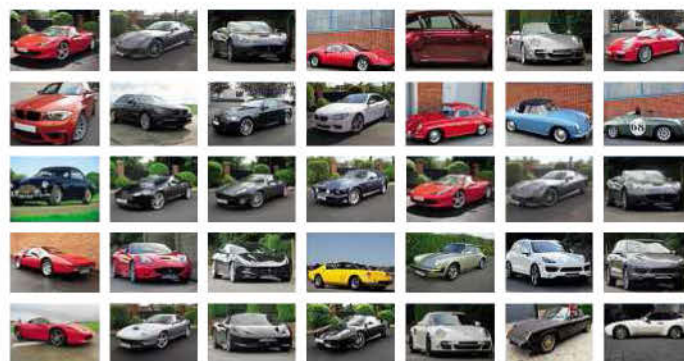
Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	Evo rating	
Lotus Exige S (V6)	171 R	£54,500	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1176kg	298	3.8	-	170	236	-	+ Breathtaking road-racer; our joint 2012 Car of the Year - Gearshift not the sweetest	★★★★★
Lotus Exige V6 Cup	191 R	£62,995	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1110kg	316	3.7	-	170	-	-	+ Half a roll-cage short of being a race car - Regular Exige S is better for road work	★★★★★
Lotus Exige S (S2)	105 R	'06-'11	4/1796	218/7800	158/5500	930kg	238	4.5	-	148	199	33.2	+ Lightweight with a hefty punch - Uninspiring soundtrack	★★★★★
Lotus Exige Cup 260 (S2)	139 D	'10-'11	4/1796	256/8000	174/6000	890kg	293	4.0	-	152	199	31.1	+ Feels like a race car, yet works on the road - Pricey for a four-pot Exige	★★★★★
Lotus Exige (S2)	068 R	'04-'08	4/1796	189/7800	133/6800	875kg	219	4.9	-	147	-	32.1	+ Highly focused road and track tool - Lacks visual impact of S1	★★★★★
Lotus Exige (S1)	200 R	'00-'01	4/1796	192/7800	146/5000	780kg	247	4.6	-	136	-	-	+ Looks and goes like Elise racer - A tad lacking in refinement	★★★★★
Lotus Evora	138 R	£52,500	6/3456	276/6400	258/4700	1382kg	203	5.6	13.6	162	217	30.3	+ Sublime ride and handling. Our 2009 car of the year - Pricy options	★★★★★
Lotus Evora S	168 R	£63,950	6/3456	345/7000	295/4500	1430kg	245	4.6	-	172	229	28.7	+ A faster and better Evora - But one which spars with the Porsche 911...	★★★★★
Maserati GranTurismo	114 R	£82,280	8/4244	399/7100	339/4750	1880kg	216	5.5	12.7	177	330	19.8	+ Striking, accomplished GT - Doesn't spike the pulse like an Aston or 911	★★★★★
Maserati GranTurismo Sport	188 R	£90,810	8/4691	454/7000	383/4750	1880kg	245	4.8	-	185	331	19.7	+ The best everyday GranTurismo yet - Starting to get long in the tooth	★★★★★
Maserati GranTurismo MC Stradale	193 R	£110,135	8/4691	454/7000	383/4750	1800kg	256	4.5	-	188	360	18.2	+ Brilliant blend of road racer and GT - Gearbox takes a little getting used to	★★★★★
Maserati Coupe	064 R	'03-'07	8/4244	390/7000	333/4500	1680kg	237	4.8	-	177	-	17.6	+ Glorious engine, improved chassis - Overly sharp steering	★★★★★
Maserati GranSport	073 R	'04-'07	8/4244	400/7000	333/4500	1680kg	239	4.8	-	180	-	-	+ Maser Coupe realises its full potential - Very little	★★★★★
Mazda RX-8	122 R	'03-'11	2R/1308	228/8200	156/5500	1429kg	162	6.5	16.4	146	299	24.6	+ Never mind the quirkiness, it's a great drive - Wafer-thin torque output	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Coupe	162 R	£58,500	8/6208	451/6800	442/5000	1655kg	277	4.4	10.3	186	280	23.5	+ Mercedes makes a proper two-door M3 rival - C63 saloon looks better	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Black	171 R	'12-'13	8/6208	510/6800	457/5200	1635kg	317	4.2	-	186	286	-	+ The C63 turned up to 11 - Too heavy, not as fiery as Black Series cars of old	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLK63 AMG	092 D	'06-'09	8/6208	481/6800	464/5000	1755kg	278	4.6	-	155	199	26.6	+ Power, control, build quality - Lacks ultimate involvement	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CLK63 AMG Black	106 R	'07-'09	8/6208	500/6800	464/5250	1760kg	289	4.2	-	186	-	-	+ AMG goes Porsche-hunting - Dull-witted gearshift spoils the party	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz CL63 AMG	150 D	£118,865	8/5461	536/5500	590/2000	2010kg	271	4.5	-	155	244	26.9	+ Presence, pace, monster engine - Stiff ride, stiff competition	★★★★★
Morgan AeroMax	120 R	'08-'09	8/4799	362/6300	370/3600	1180kg	312	4.1	-	170	-	-	+ Weird and utterly wonderful - Only 100 were made	★★★★★
Nissan 370Z	180 R	£27,015	6/3696	326/7000	269/5200	1520kg	218	5.4	-	155	248	26.7	+ Quicker, leaner, keener than 350Z - Not quite a Cayman-killer	★★★★★
Nissan 370Z Nismo	193 R	£37,015	6/3696	339/7400	274/5200	1535kg	224	5.2	-	155	248	26.6	+ More controlled, more polished, more fun - More expensive	★★★★★
Nissan 350Z	107 R	'03-'09	6/3498	309/6800	264/4800	1532kg	205	5.5	13.0	155	-	24.1	+ Huge fun, and great value too - Honestly, we're struggling	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2012MY/2013MY/2014MY)	200 R	£78,020	6/3799	542/6400	466/3200	1740kg	316	3.2	7.5	196	275	24.0	+ GT-R is quicker and better than ever - But costs over £20K more than its launch price	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R Nismo	199 R	£125,000	6/3799	592/6800	481/3200	1720kg	350	2.6	-	196	275	24.0	+ Manages to make regular GT-R feel imprecise - Compromised by super-firm suspension	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2010MY)	152 R	'10-'12	6/3799	523/6400	451/3200	1740kg	305	3.0	-	194	279	23.5	+ More powerful version of the original - But they're not worlds apart to drive	★★★★★
Nissan GT-R (2008MY)	125 R	'08-'10	6/3799	473/6400	434/3200	1740kg	276	3.8	-	193	-	-	+ Our 2008 Car of the Year, now from just £35K - You won't see 20mpg often	★★★★★
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R34)	196 R	'99-'02	6/2568	276/7000	289/4400	1560kg	180	4.7	12.5	165	-	20.1	+ Big, brutal, and great fun - Needs more than the standard 276bhp	★★★★★
Nissan Skyline GT-R (R33)	196 R	'97-'99	6/2568	276/6800	271/4400	1540kg	182	5.4	14.3	155	-	22.0	+ Proof that Japanese hi-tech can work (superbly) - Limited supply	★★★★★
Noble M400	089 R	'04-'06	6/2968	425/6500	390/5000	1060kg	407	3.5	-	185	-	-	+ Devilishly fast - Demon Tweaks interior	★★★★★
Noble M12 GTO-3R	200 R	'03-'06	6/2968	352/6200	350/3500	1080kg	332	3.8	-	170	-	-	+ The ability to humble exotica - Notchy gearchange can spoil the flow	★★★★★
Peugeot RCZ 1.6 THP 200	155 R	£26,900	4/1598	191/5500	202/1700	1421kg	141	7.3	18.1	147	155	42.1	+ Distinctive looks, highly capable handling - Could be a bit more exciting	★★★★★
Peugeot RCZ R	193 R	£32,000	4/1598	266/6000	243/1900	1355kg	199	5.9	-	155	145	44.8	+ The best RCZ yet - 1.6-litre engine needs to be worked hard	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman (981)	185 F	£39,694	6/2706	271/7400	214/4500	1310kg	210	5.7	-	165	192	34.4	+ Very enticing for the money in basic spec - You might still want the power of the 'S'	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman S (981)	202 R	£48,783	6/3436	321/7400	273/4500	1320kg	247	4.5	10.5	175	206	32.1	+ The Cayman comes of age - Erm...	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman GTS (981)	203 R	£55,397	6/3436	335/7400	280/4750	1345kg	253	4.9	-	177	211	31.4	+ Tweaks improve an already sublime package - Slightly 'aftermarket' looks	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman (987)	131 R	'11-'13	6/2893	261/7200	221/4400	1330kg	199	5.8	-	165	221	30.1	+ Extra power, just as involving - Still lacks the desirability of other Porsches	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman S (987)	132 R	'06-'13	6/3436	316/7200	273/4750	1350kg	237	5.2	-	172	223	29.7	+ Still want that 911? - Yeah, us too	★★★★★
Porsche Cayman R (987)	158 R	'11-'13	6/3436	325/7400	273/4750	1295kg	255	4.7	-	175	228	29.1	+ Total handling excellence - Styling additions not to all tastes	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (991)	199 R	£73,509	6/3436	345/7400	288/5600	1380kg	254	4.7	-	179	212	31.4	+ 911 becomes cleaner and cleverer - But some of its character's gone AWOL	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (991)	201 R	£83,545	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1395kg	287	4.3	9.5	188	224	29.7	+ As above, but with supercar pace - Electric steering robs it of some tactility	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera 4 (991)	177 D	£78,365	6/3436	345/7400	288/5600	1430kg	245	4.5	-	177	219	30.4	+ A touch more engaging than 2wd 991 - Still stand-offish compared to 997	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera 4S (991)	179 R	£88,400	6/3800	394/7400	324/5600	1445kg	271	4.5	-	185	234	28.5	+ The best 991-generation Carrera - Choose your spec carefully	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (997.2)	121 R	'08-'11	6/3800	380/6500	310/4400	1425kg	271	4.7	-	188	242	27.4	+ Poise, precision, blinding pace - Feels a bit clinical	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera S (997.1)	070 R	'04-'08	6/3824	350/6600	295/4600	1420kg	246	4.6	10.9	182	-	24.5	+ evo Car of the Year 2004; like a junior GT3 - Tech overload?	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (996 3.4)	008 R	'98-'01	6/3387	300/6800	258/4600	1320kg	230	4.6	-	173	-	28.0	+ evo Car of the Year 1998; beautifully polished - Some like a bit of rough	★★★★★
Porsche 911 Carrera (993)		'94-'97	6/3600	285/6100	251/5250	1372kg	211	5.2	-	168	-	25.0	+ More character than 996 - Harder work at speed	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (991)	198 R	£100,540	6/3799	468/8250	324/6250	1430kg	332	3.5	-	196	289	23.0	+ evo Car of the Year 2013 - At its best at licence-troubling speeds	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (997.2)	182 R	'09-'11	6/3797	429/7600	317/6250	1395kg	312	4.2	9.2	194	303	22.1	+ Even better than the car it replaced - Give us a minute...	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (3.8, 997.2)	200 R	'10-'11	6/3797	444/7900	317/6750	1370kg	329	4.0	-	193	314	-	+ Our favourite car from the first 200 issues of evo - For people like us, nothing	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS 4.0 (997.2)	187 R	'11-'12	6/3996	493/8250	339/5750	1360kg	368	3.8	-	193	326	-	+ evo Car of the Year 2011 - Unforgiving on-road ride; crazy used prices	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (997.1)	182 R	'07-'09	6/3600	409/7600	298/5500	1395kg	298	4.3	9.4	192	-	-	+ Runner-up evo Car of the Year 2006 - Ferrari 599 GTBs	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (997.1)	105 R	'07-'09	6/3600	409/7600	298/5500	1375kg	302	4.2	-	193	-	-	+ evo Car of the Year 2007 - A chunk more money than the brilliant GT3	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (996.2)	082 R	'03-'05	6/3600	375/7400	284/5000	1380kg	272	4.3	9.2	190	-	-	+ evo Car of the Year 2003 - Chassis is a bit too track-focused for some roads	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 RS (996.2)	068 R	'03-'05	6/3600	375/7400	284/5000	1330kg	286	4.2	9.2	190	-	-	+ Track-biased version of above - Limited supply	★★★★★
Porsche 911 GT3 (996.1)	182 R	'99	6/3600	360/7200	273/5000	1350kg	271	4.5	10.3	187	-	21.9	+ evo Car of the Year 1999 - Porsche didn't build enough	★★★★★
Porsche 968 Club Sport	019 R	'93-'95	4/2990	240/6200	225/4100	1335kg	183	6.1	15.7	149	-	-	+ One of the all-time greats - Lots have been driven very hard	★★★★★
Rolls-Royce Wraith	189 D	£226,800	12/6592	624/5600	590/1500	2360kg	269	4.4	-	155	327	20.2	+ Brilliant at wafting; quicker than you'd expect - Not the most engaging drivers' car	★★★★★
Subaru BRZ	170 R	£22,495	4/1998	197/7000	151/6400	1230kg	163	7.6	-	140	181	36.2	+ Fine chassis, great steering - Weak engine, not the slide-happy car they promised	★★★★★
Toyota GT86	174 R	£22,995	4/1998	197/7000	151/6400	1275kg	157	7.6	-	140	181	36.2	+ More fun than its cousin (above) - Same lack of torque, poor interior quality	★★★★★
Toyota Celica GT-Four ST205	187 R	'94-'99	4/1998	239/6000	223/4000	1496kg	162	5.2	-	143	-	-	+ Criminally overlooked homologation special - Finding one	★★★★★
TVR Sagaris	097 R	'05-'07	6/3996	406/7500	349/5000	1078kg	383	3.7	-	185	-	-	+ Looks outrageous - 406bhp feels a touch optimistic	★★★★★
TVR Tuscan S (Mk2)	076 R	'05-'07	6/3996	400/7000	315/5250	1100kg	369	4.0	-	185	-	-	+ Possibly TVR's best ever car - Aerodynamic 'enhancements'	★★★★★
TVR Cerbera Speed Six	004 R	'98-'04	6/3996	350/6800	330/5000	1130kg	315	5.0	11.4	160+	-	-	+ Accomplished and desirable - Check chassis for corrosion	★★★★★
VW Scirocco GT 2.0 TSI	155 R	£25,845	4/1984	217/4500	258/1500	1369kg	158	6.5	-	153	139	47.1	+ Golf GTI price and performance - Interior lacks flair	★★★★★
VW Scirocco R	200 D	£32,295	4/1984	276/6000	258/2500	1426kg	187	5.7	-	155	187	35.3	+ Great engine, grown-up dynamics - Perhaps a little too grown-up for some	★★★★★

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Our Choice

Ferrari 458 Speciale. The regular 458 Italia is amazing enough in itself, but the Speciale follows in the tradition of the 360 Challenge Stradale and 430 Scuderia and makes the car it is based on even more, well, special. Our 2014 Car of the Year, and the supercar to buy.



Best of the Rest

Porsche's 918 Spyder (left) pips the McLaren P1 on the road, and vice versa on the track. (Is the LaFerrari better still? We'll let you know when we get one together with its hybrid rivals.) Meanwhile, Pagani's Huayra was our joint 2012 Car of the Year and Lamborghini's Aventador offers true supercar drama.

Supercars

Car	Issue no.	Price	Engine cyl/cc	bhp/rpm	lb ft/rpm	Weight	bhp/ton	0-60mph	0-100mph	Max mph	CO2 g/km	EC mpg	EVO rating	
9ff GT9R	127 D	£450,000	6/4000	1120/7850	774/5970	1346kg	845	2.9	-	260	-	-	+ Above 100mph eats Veyrons for breakfast - Eats M3 dust at traffic lights	★★★★★
Aston Martin Vanquish (Mk2)	203 R	£192,995	12/5935	568/6650	465/5500	1739kg	332	3.6	-	201	298	22.1	+ Much better than the DBS it succeeds, especially in 2015MY form - It's no Ferrari F12	★★★★★
Aston Martin Vanquish S (Mk1)	110 R	£195,000	05-'07	12/5935	520/7000	425/5800	1875kg	282	4.9	10.1	200	-	+ Vanquish joins supercar greats - A tad intimidating at the limit	★★★★★
Aston Martin One-77	179 R	£10-12	12/7312	750/6000	553/7600	1740kg	438	3.7	-	220+	-	-	+ The engine, the looks, the drama - Gearbox hates manoeuvring; only 77 were made	★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron Super Sport	151 R	£52.0m	16/7993	1183/6400	1106/3000	1838kg	654	2.5	-	268	539	12.2	+ The world's fastest supercar - Limited to 258mph for us mere mortals	★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron Grand Sport Vitesse	185 R	£51.7m	16/7993	1183/6400	1106/3000	1990kg	604	2.6	-	254	539	12.2	+ The world's fastest convertible - Limited to 258mph for us mere mortals	★★★★★
Bugatti Veyron 16.4	134 R	£105-11	16/7993	1000/6000	922/2200	1950kg	521	2.8	5.8	253	596	11.4	+ Superbly engineered 4WD quad-turbo rocket - Er, lacks luggage space?	★★★★★
Bugatti EB110	078 R	£91-95	12/3500	552/8000	451/3750	1566kg	358	3.4	-	212	-	-	+ Superbly engineered 4WD quad-turbo rocket - It just fizzled out	★★★★★
Caparo T1	138 R	£301,975	8/3499	575/10,500	310/9000	689kg	848	3.8	6.2	205	-	-	+ Absolutely staggering performance - Absolutely staggering price tag	★★★★★
Chevrolet Corvette ZR1	133 R	£99-13	8/6162	638/6500	603/3800	1528kg	424	3.8	7.6	205	355	18.8	+ Huge pace and character - Take plenty of brave pills if there's rain	★★★★★
Ferrari 458 Italia	183 R	£178,551	8/4497	562/9000	398/6000	1485kg	384	3.2	6.8	202	307	20.6	+ An astounding achievement, looks fantastic - There'll never be a manual	★★★★★
Ferrari 458 Spider	185 R	£198,996	8/4497	562/9000	398/6000	1530kg	373	3.3	-	198	275	23.9	+ A 458 that sounds and feels more organic - Er, 4mph slower than the Italia?	★★★★★
Ferrari 458 Speciale	203 R	£208,090	8/4497	591/9000	398/6000	1395kg	435	3.0	-	202+	275	23.9	+ evo Car of the Year 2014 - If you don't own a regular 458, nothing	★★★★★
Ferrari F430	163 R	£104-10	8/4308	483/8500	343/5250	1449kg	339	4.0	-	196	-	18.6	+ Just brilliant - Didn't you read the plus point?	★★★★★
Ferrari 430 Scuderia	121 R	£97-10	8/4308	503/8500	347/5250	1350kg	378	3.5	7.7	198	-	15.7	+ Successful F1 technology transplant - Likes to shout about it	★★★★★
Ferrari Scuderia Spider 16M	133 D	£99	09	8/4308	503/8500	1440kg	355	3.7	-	196	360	18.0	+ A hardcore soft-top Ferrari - Earplugs recommended	★★★★★
Ferrari 360 Modena	163 R	£99-04	8/3586	394/8500	275/4750	1390kg	288	4.5	9.0	183	-	17.0	+ Worthy successor to 355 - Not quite as involving as it should be	★★★★★
Ferrari 360 Challenge Stradale	068 R	£103-04	8/3586	420/8500	275/4750	1280kg	333	4.1	-	186	-	-	+ Totally exhilarating road-racer. It's loud - It's very, very loud	★★★★★
Ferrari F355 F1 Berlinetta	163 R	£97-99	8/3496	374/8250	268/6000	1350kg	281	4.7	-	183	-	16.7	+ Looks terrific, sounds even better - Are you kidding?	★★★★★
Ferrari F12 Berlinetta	190 R	£240,083	12/6262	730/8250	509/6000	1630kg	455	3.1	-	211	350	18.8	+ 730bhp isn't too much power for the road - Super-quick steering is an acquired taste	★★★★★
Ferrari 599 GTB Fiorano	101 R	£106-12	12/5999	611/7600	448/5600	1688kg	368	3.5	7.4	205	415	15.8	+ evo Car of the Year 2006 - Banks are getting harder to rob	★★★★★
Ferrari 599 GTO	161 R	£11-12	12/5999	661/8250	457/6500	1605kg	418	3.4	-	208	-	-	+ One of the truly great Ferraris - Erm, the air con isn't very good	★★★★★
Ferrari 575M Fiorano Handling Pack	200 R	£102-06	12/5748	508/7250	434/5250	1730kg	298	4.2	9.6	202	-	12.3	+ Fiorano pack makes 575 truly great - It should have been standard	★★★★★
Ferrari 550 Maranello	169 R	£97-02	12/5474	485/7000	415/5000	1716kg	287	4.3	10.0	199	-	12.3	+ Everything - Nothing	★★★★★
Ferrari FF	194 R	£227,167	12/6262	651/8000	504/6000	1880kg	347	3.7	-	208	360	15.4	+ Four seats and 4WD, but a proper Ferrari - Looks divide opinion	★★★★★
Ferrari 612 Scaglietti F1	090 R	£104-11	12/5748	533/7250	434/5250	1840kg	294	4.3	9.8	199	470	13.8	+ Awesomely capable grand tourer - See above	★★★★★
Ferrari LaFerrari	203 R	£51m	12/6262	950/9000	664/6750	1255kg	769	3.0	-	217+	330	-	+ Perhaps the greatest Ferrari ever - Brakes lack a touch of precision on track	★★★★★
Ferrari Enzo	203 R	£102-04	12/5999	651/7800	485/5500	1365kg	485	3.5	6.7	217+	545	-	+ Intoxicating, exploitable - Cabin detailing falls short of a Zonda or F1's	★★★★★
Ferrari F50	186 R	£96-97	12/4699	513/8500	347/6500	1230kg	424	3.9	-	202	-	-	+ A better drivers' Ferrari than the 288, F40 or Enzo - Not better looking, though	★★★★★
Ferrari F40	199 R	£87-92	8/2936	471/7000	426/4000	1100kg	437	4.1	-	201	-	-	+ Brutally fast - It's in the dictionary under 'turbo lag'	★★★★★
Ferrari 288 GTO	064 R	£84-85	8/2855	394/7000	366/3800	1160kg	345	4.9	-	189	-	-	+ Painfully beautiful, rarer than the F40 - You are joking?	★★★★★
Ford GT	200 R	£104-06	8/5409	550/6500	500/3750	1583kg	353	3.7	-	205	-	-	+ Our 2005 Car of the Year - Don't scalp yourself getting in	★★★★★
Gumpert Apollo	110 R	£275,000	8/4163	690/6300	675/4000	1200kg	584	3.0	-	220+	-	-	+ Stupendous performance, Apollo - High price, Gumpert	★★★★★
Hennessey Venom GT	180 R	£900,000	8/7000	1244/6500	1155/4000	1244kg	1016	2.5	-	270	-	-	+ 0-200mph in 14.5sec, and it handles too - Looks like an Exige	★★★★★
Jaguar XJ220	157 R	£92-94	6/3498	542/7200	475/4500	1470kg	375	3.7	-	213	-	-	+ Britain's greatest supercar... - ...until McLaren built the F1	★★★★★
Koenigsegg Agera R	180 R	£101,09m	8/5032	1124/7100	885/2700	1435kg	796	2.8	-	273	-	-	+ As fast and exciting as your body can handle - It's Veyron money	★★★★★
Koenigsegg One:1	202 R	£102.0m	8/5065	1341/7500	1011/6000	1360kg	1002	2.9	-	273	-	-	+ The most powerful car we've ever tested - It's sold out; we couldn't afford one anyway...	★★★★★
Koenigsegg CCX	094 R	£106-10	8/4700	806/6900	678/5700	1180kg	694	3.9	7.7	245+	-	-	+ Sweden's greatest supercar - Sweden's only supercar	★★★★★
Koenigsegg CCRX Edition	118 R	£88-10	8/4800	1004/7000	796/5600	1280kg	797	2.8	-	250+	-	-	+ One of the world's fastest cars - Spikey power delivery	★★★★★
Lamborghini Huracán LP610-4	201 R	£186,760	10/5204	602/8250	413/6500	1532kg	399	3.2	-	202+	290	22.6	+ Rare depth of character and ability - Takes work to find its sweet-spot	★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4	180 D	£108-13	10/5204	552/8000	398/6500	1410kg	398	3.7	-	202	325	16.0	+ Still a missile from A to B - Starting to show its age	★★★★★
Lamborghini LP570-4 Superleggera	152 R	£107-13	10/5204	562/8000	398/6500	1340kg	426	3.5	-	202	325	20.6	+ Less weight and more power than original Superleggera - LP560-4 runs it very close	★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo	094 R	£106-08	10/4961	513/8000	376/4250	1520kg	343	4.3	9.4	196	-	-	+ On a full-bore start it spins all four wheels. Cool - Slightly clunky e-gear	★★★★★
Lamborghini Gallardo Superleggera	104 R	£107-08	10/4961	522/8000	376/4250	1420kg	373	3.8	-	196	-	-	+ Lighter, more agile - Grabby carbon brakes, clunky e-gear	★★★★★
Lamborghini Aventador LP700-4	194 R	£260,040	12/6498	690/8250	509/5500	1575kg	445	2.9	-	217	370	17.7	+ Most important new Lambo since the Countach - Erm... expensive?	★★★★★
Lamborghini Aventador Roadster	184 R	£294,665	12/6498	690/8250	509/5500	1625kg	431	3.0	-	217	370	17.7	+ Sensational engine and styling - A wee bit on the thirsty side	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murciélago	089 D	£101-06	12/6192	570/7500	479/5400	1650kg	351	4.0	-	205	-	-	+ Gorgeous, capable and incredibly friendly - V12 feels stressed	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murciélago LP640	093 R	£106-11	12/6496	631/8000	487/6000	1665kg	385	3.3	-	211	-	21.3	+ Compelling old-school supercar - You'd better be on your toes	★★★★★
Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV	200 R	£109-11	12/6496	661/8000	487/6500	1565kg	429	3.2	7.3	212	-	-	+ A supercar in its truest, wildest sense - Be prepared for stares	★★★★★
Lamborghini Diablo 6.0	019 R	£100-02	12/5992	550/7100	457/5500	1625kg	343	3.8	-	200+	-	-	+ Best-built, best-looking Diablo of all - People's perceptions	★★★★★
Lamborghini Countach 5000 QV	184 R	£88-91	12/5167	455/7000	369/5200	1488kg	311	4.2	10.0	182	-	13.7	+ Still the definitive supercar - Visibility, pract- oh hell, who cares?	★★★★★
Lexus LFA/LFA Nürburgring	200 R	£10-12	10/4805	552/8700	354/6800	1480kg	379	3.7	-	202	-	-	+ Absurd and compelling supercar - Badge and price don't quite match	★★★★★
Maserati MC12	079 R	£104-05	12/5998	621/7500	481/5500	1445kg	437	3.8	-	205	-	-	+ Rarer than an Enzo - The Ferrari's better	★★★★★
McLaren 650S	196 R	£195,250	8/3799	641/7250	500/6000	1428kg	456	3.0	-	207	275	24.2	+ Better brakes, balance and looks than 12C; more power too - Costs an extra £19k	★★★★★
McLaren 12C	187 R	£11-14	8/3799	616/7500	442/3000	1434kg	435	3.1	-	207	279	24.2	+ Staggering performance, refinement - Engine noise can be grating	★★★★★
McLaren P1	200 R	£866,000	8/3799	903/7500	664/4000	1395kg	658	2.8	-	217	194	34.0	+ Freakish breadth of ability - At its mind-bending best on track	★★★★★
McLaren F1	186 R	£94-98	12/6064	627/7500	479/4000	1137kg	560	3.2	6.3	240+	-	19.0	+ Still the most single-minded supercar ever - There'll never be another	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG Black	131 R	£109-10	12/5980	661/5400	737/2200	1876kg	358	4.0	8.1	199	-	-	+ Bonkers looks, bonkers speed - Bonkers £250K price	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG	159 R	£168,395	8/6208	563/6800	479/4750	1620kg	335	4.1	8.4	197	308	21.4	+ Great engine and chassis (gulling doors too!) - Slightly tardy gearbox	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG Black	200 R	£229,985	8/6208	622/7400	468/5500	1550kg	408	3.6	-	196	321	20.6	+ Stunning engine, superb body control - Appetite for expensive tyres	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren	073 R	£104-07	8/5439	617/6500	575/3250	1693kg	370	3.7	-	208	-	-	+ Zonda-pace, 575-style drivability - Dreadful brake feel	★★★★★
Noble M600	186 R	£102,000	8/4439	650/6800	604/3800	1198kg	551	3.8	7.7	225	-	-	+ Spiritual successor to the Ferrari F40 - It's a bit pricey	★★★★★
Pagani Huayra	185 R	£105-12	12/5980	720/5800	737/2250	1350kg	542	3.3	-	224	-	-	+ Our joint 2012 Car of the Year - Engine isn't as nape-prickling as the Zonda's	★★★★★
Pagani Zonda 760RS	170 R	£15m	12/7291	750/6300	575/4500	1210kg	630	3.3	-					

Track Times

Key

+ = new addition this month. Red denotes the car is the fastest in its class.

Car	Lap time	Peak mph	issue no.	Conditions
Radical SR8LM (fastest car)	1:13.6	127.8	138	Dry
Caparo T1 (fastest supercar)	1:14.8	130.9	131	Dry
Ferrari 458 Italia	1:19.3	120.0	159	Dry
Gumpert Apollo S	1:19.4	120.4	119	Dry
McLaren MP4-12C (Corsa tyres)	1:19.6	121.2	159	Dry
Caterham Levante V8	1:19.6	118.6	131	Dry
Porsche 997 GT2 RS	1:19.9	122.3	158	Dry
Lotus 2-Eleven GT4	1:20.1	113.2	138	Dry
Caterham Superlight R500	1:20.2	115.7	119	Dry
McLaren MP4-12C	1:20.6	120.9	159	Dry
Noble M600	1:20.8	121.8	159	Dry
Porsche 997 GT3 RS 4.0 (fastest coupe)	1:21.0	118.2	160	Dry
Lamborghini Murciélago LP670-4 SV	1:21.3	121.1	134	Dry
Ariel Atom 3 Supercharged	1:21.5	113.6	119	Dry
KTM X-Bow (300bhp)	1:21.5	112.7	138	Dry
Ferrari 430 Scuderia	1:21.7	117.2	121	Dry
Porsche 997.2 GT3 RS (3.8)	1:21.9	116.8	150	Dry
Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4	1:22.5	119.1	122	Dry
Brooke Double R	1:22.5	113.2	119	Dry
Lamborghini Murciélago LP640	1:22.9	116.7	143	Dry
Porsche Carrera GT	1:23.3	115.2	119	Dry
Porsche 997.2 GT3	1:23.3	114.5	138	Dry
Porsche 997 Turbo S	1:23.5	117.5	146	Dry
Porsche 997 GT2	1:23.5	115.1	119	Dry
Nissan GT-R (2008MY)	1:23.6	113.1	119	Dry
Porsche 991 Carrera	1:23.6	112.5	182	Dry
Porsche 991 Carrera Cabriolet	1:23.9	112.3	183	Dry
Mercedes-Benz SL63 AMG	1:23.9	-	YouTube	Dry
Porsche 997 Turbo	1:24.1	113.5	136	Damp
Lotus 340R (190bhp)	1:24.2	110.0	135	Dry
Porsche Boxster S (981)	1:24.2	109.3	183	Dry
Caterham Superlight R300	1:24.3	101.5	138	Dry
Maserati GranTurismo MC Stradale	1:24.5	115.1	160	Dry
Porsche Cayman S (981)	1:24.5	109.2	202	Dry
Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG	1:24.6	115.7	146	Dry
Porsche Boxster Spyder (987)	1:24.7	107.7	167	Dry
Caterham 7 Supersport	1:24.8	101.6	YouTube	Dry
Ferrari California	1:25.0	111.8	134	Dry
KTM X-Bow	1:25.0	105.0	123	Dry
BMW E92 M3 Coupe	1:25.1	109.1	162	Dry
Mercedes-Benz SL65 AMG Black	1:25.2	108.6	131	Dry
Jaguar F-type V8 S	1:25.2	111.2	183	Dry
Audi RS5	1:25.4	108.8	162	Dry
Audi R8 Spyder V8	1:25.5	107.0	167	Dry
Porsche Cayman R	1:25.5	106.8	158	Dry
Aston Martin V8 Vantage Roadster	1:25.6	109.1	183	Dry
BMW M5 (F10) (fastest saloon)	1:25.7	112.0	165	Dry
Jaguar XKR-S	1:25.7	-	YouTube	Dry
Aston Martin V12 Vantage	1:25.8	110.9	146	Dry
Mitsubishi Evo X FQ-400	1:25.9	107.5	138	Dry
BMW 1-series M Coupe	1:25.9	106.4	158	Dry
Mitsubishi Evo X RS 360	1:26.1	106.6	153	Dry
Renaultsport Mégane 265 Trophy (fastest hot hatch)	1:26.1	105.3	166	Dry
Jaguar F-type S Coupe	1:26.2	106.3	202	Dry
Audi TTR S	1:26.3	107.2	149	Dry
Aston Martin DBS	1:26.4	109.5	143	Dry
Porsche Panamera Turbo	1:26.5	109.2	137	Dry
Audi RS6 Avant (C7) (fastest estate)	1:26.5	-	YouTube	Dry
BMW M135i	1:26.6	-	YouTube	Dry
Jaguar XJ220	1:26.7	111.7	131	Dry
Porsche Cayenne Turbo S (fastest 4x4)	1:26.8	106.1	YouTube	Dry
Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG	1:26.8	104.9	165	Dry
Porsche Cayenne Turbo	1:26.9	107.4	158	Dry
Lotus Evora	1:27.1	104.2	145	Dry
Nissan 370Z	1:27.1	104.0	158	Dry
Jaguar F-type V6 S	1:27.2	105.0	YouTube	Dry
Porsche Panamera S	1:27.3	102.4	165	Dry
Renaultsport Mégane 265 Cup	1:27.3	-	YouTube	Dry
Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Coupe	1:27.7	111.0	162	Dry
Lotus Elise SC	1:27.7	104.6	131	Dry
Audi S3	1:27.7	-	YouTube	Dry
Vauxhall VXR8 Bathurst S	1:27.8	106.1	131	Dry
BMW E46 M3 CSL	1:27.8	105.4	153	Dry
Renaultsport Mégane R26.R	1:27.8	103.3	-	-
Audi RS6 Avant (C6) (fastest estate)	1:27.9	111.0	121	Dry
Jaguar XFR	1:27.9	108.1	137	Dry
SEAT Leon Cupra 280	1:28.0	-	YouTube	Dry
Lexus IS-F	1:28.1	106.4	151	Dry
Porsche Boxster S (987)	1:28.1	105.4	120	Dry
Subaru WRX STI	1:28.3	101.6	157	Dry
SEAT Leon Cupra R	1:28.7	102.4	162	Dry
Bentley Continental Supersports	1:29.2	105.8	149	Dry
Lotus Elise Club Racer	1:29.2	95.5	162	Dry
Renaultsport Mégane 250 Cup	1:29.9	101.4	156	Dry
Vauxhall VXR8 Clubsport Tourer	1:29.9	-	YouTube	Dry
Honda NSX	1:30.1	101.3	145	Dry
Nissan 370Z Roadster	1:30.3	100.1	173	Dry
Ford Fiesta ST	1:30.4	97.1	YouTube	Dry

TRACK MAP



West Circuit facts

- Location Bedford Autodrome
- Opened 1999
- Length 1.85 miles (2.98 kilometres)

- Direction Anti-clockwise
- Left turns 9
- Right turns 6

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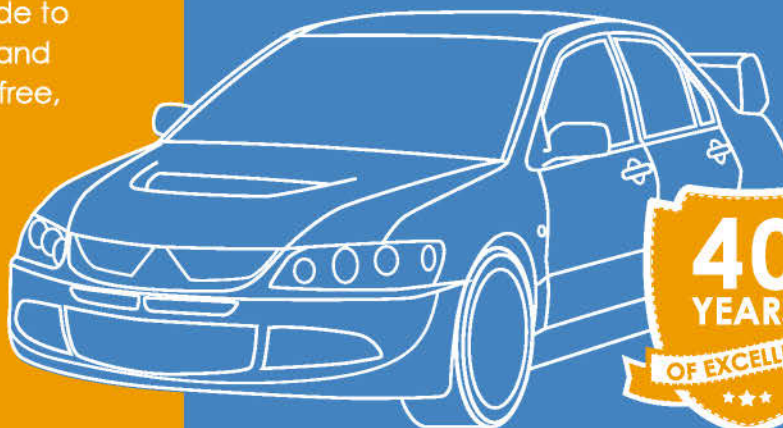
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Camera: Canon EOS 5D Mark III. Focal length: 25mm. Exposure: 1/125sec at f/7.1 (ISO 50)



BMW M3 CSL carbon airbox

by DAVID VIVIAN | PHOTOGRAPHY by MALCOLM GRIFFITHS

EVEN FOR A COMPANY THAT EMPLOYS SO MANY people rocking fast footwear, BMW Motorsport's launch of a lightweight E46 M3 back in 2003 – the now iconic and appreciating CSL – was big news. Big because the regular M3 – with its 3.2-litre straight-six developing 338bhp at 7900rpm, and supported by a trick M differential, beefier brakes and an extensive development of the E36 M3's chassis with bespoke springs and dampers and thicker anti-roll bars – seemed pretty handy as it was.

No matter. When the M3 CSL hit the streets, there were gasps. Here was a hardcore statement of intent. Here was a car designed to rescue the M3's track-evolved credibility following the disappointingly tubby E36 years. The CSL had a carbonfibre roof and rear diffuser, aluminium doors, a plastic bootlid and lightweight 19-inch alloys shod with super-grippy Michelin Pilot Sport Cup tyres. It had lightweight bucket seats and a carbon-clad cabin. It weighed a whopping 110 kilos less than the standard M3.

And with 355bhp, courtesy of an outrageously in-yer-face fist of a carbonfibre airbox, larger diameter inlet manifolds and reprofiled camshafts, the full-throttle upshifts hurled at the rear wheels by the robotised-manual paddle-equipped SMG transmission could almost bring tears to your eyes.

Inside and out, the CSL looked svelte and suavely savage. Sounded it, too, that race-style carbon airbox, with its trumpet-contoured interior, extending the engine's aerobic reach to exotic heights but also acting a little like a quality hi-fi amp, bringing extra definition and clarity to what was already a motor with a deliciously angry, but slightly muffled, acoustic presence. The stonking soundtrack and fiercely punctuated, neck-twanging acceleration positively urged maximum conviction and commitment from the driver.

Arguably, no six-cylinder engine from Munich has ever raised more neck hairs than the CSL's. Tell the truth, few engines from anywhere have ever sounded better. Within the BMW M division, the M1's, maybe? A little louder but with more mechanical thrash and less acoustic power. An E92 M3's, then? A properly edgy V8 warble but volume limited and far too civilised by comparison. The V8 M5's, surely? A creamy baritone but hardly brutish. The CSL drowns it, kills it.

It's a sound that seductively asserts that the E46 CSL remains the most focused, hardcore M3 of the lot and more than repays all the effort the M division's single-minded paring and honing injected into the driving experience. When you lean on that 355bhp at 7900rpm the CSL really feels like it's doing an honest day's work while howling for more. We can thank the carbon airbox for giving maximum effort such an evocative voice. ☒

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Standard EU Test figures for comparative purposes and may not reflect real driving results. Model shown is a Leon 5dr 1.4TSI ACT 150PS FR at £20,000 RRP with optional metallic paint at £530 RRP, Titanium Pack at £705 RRP and full LED headlights available free of charge on selected models. Offer may be varied or withdrawn at any time. Retail Sales only. *Deposit contribution available to customers who purchase their vehicle with Hire Purchase from SEAT Finance only. Indemnities may be required. Subject to status. Offer available until 31st December. Participating Dealers only. Over 18s. Offer may be varied or withdrawn at any time. T&Cs apply. Freepost SEAT Finance. *£1,930 RRP refers to optional specification if priced individually. [^]Based on 0% APR Representative Hire Purchase with £9,618 deposit for model shown.



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